

**AGRARIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND CLASS RELATIONS
IN TWO VILLAGES OF JALPAIGURI DISTRICT :
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SUBSISTENCE
AND PLANTATION SETTINGS**

**A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**By
VIRGINIUS XAXA**

**to the
DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, KANPUR
FEBRUARY, 1978**

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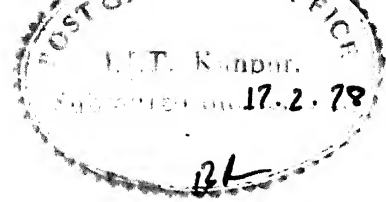
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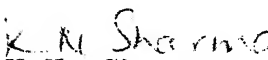
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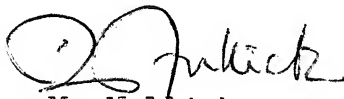
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Acknowledgements

To Prof. D.N. Dhanagare, my thesis supervisor, I owe a profound debt of gratitude for not only having gone through the dissertation with meticulous care and for having shown personal care and interest in every stage of my work but also for having aroused my interest in the area of agrarian social structure and change. I would also like to express my appreciation and thanks to Dr. J. Pandey and Dr. G.P. Keshava for their willingness to take care of the administrative problems that threatened to impede my work during Prof. Dhanagare's long leave from the Institute.

I have benefited much from my discussion with Prof. P.C. Joshi of Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi and Dr. R.K. Lahiri of Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta. I should like to put on record my appreciation to them for these discussions as well as the courtesy shown by them during my stay in their respective Institutes.

In the course of field work I have been helped a great deal by a few persons and friends. Mr. P. Topno arranged for my field work. Md. T. Huque from Sanyasikata and Mr. B. Barla from Meenglas made my stay possible and comfortable in their villages. Md. A. Bhasid and Mr. P. Xalxo made the interviewing much easier because of their popularity with the villagers. A. Kesh, S. Sarkar and H. Lakra of the Land Settlement Department and C. Singh, the manager of the Meenglas Tea State gave me free access to their

records and files. I thank them all for their help and all the respondents for their cooperation without which, the field work would not have been as smooth and brief as it was.

I would like to thank my friend, Dr. A.K. Dua for his help in one way or the other and Mrs. R. Sharan for having read the proofs. I should like to also thank Mr. R.N. Srivastava for an excellent typing job.

To Chameli, my wife, I owe much more than I can express for having gone much beyond the matrimonial vows by agreeing to type the first draft of my thesis as well assisting me in various stages of my work.

I should like to dedicate this work to my mother as I would not have been what I am today but for her silent sacrifices.

- Virginius Xaxa

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SYNOPSIS

"Agrarian Social Structure and Class Relations in Two Villages of Jalpaiguri District: A Comparative Study of the Subsistence and Plantation Settings" - A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Virginus Xaxa to the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.

The Indian rural society has undergone considerable change in the recent past, particularly since the Independence as a result of a series of the land reform legislations that have accelerated the pace of this change. This explains why the changing agrarian relations constitute one of the basic intellectual concerns of social scientists, including sociologists in India. The present study of the agrarian social structure and class relations in two villages of Jalpaiguri district is an attempt to deepen our understanding of the complex agrarian social reality and change in India. It is a comparative study of two villages - one from the 'subsistence' and the other from the 'plantation' setting in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. Jalpaiguri has certain distinctive features which set it apart from other districts. The most important of these features is the coexistence of plantation (sector of large-scale capitalist agriculture) and subsistence (sector of predominantly subsistence oriented agriculture) economies.

Our focus in this study is primarily on understanding social arrangements on land - the most important means of production in the Indian rural society in general and Jalpaiguri district in

particular. Furthermore we are interested in comparing these arrangements (with particular emphasis on land rights - legal and/ customary, and the whole range of social relations they give rise to) in the subsistence with those found in the plantation setting the district. We have attempted to identify those social categories which occupy definite, but different, positions in the structure of land control and land use. The major objectives of the study (discussed in Chapter I), therefore are:

- (i) to identify class composition and class relations as they have developed from time to time, and as they are today, in both the plantation and subsistence settings of Jalpaiguri district;
- (ii) to compare and contrast the agrarian social structure and class relations in the twin settings; and
- (iii) to examine the nature of interrelationships between the plantation and the subsistence settings and outside world in an attempt to explain, even tentatively, as to why the two distinct modes and relations of production have been coexisting in Jalpaiguri district.

Methodologically our exercise is based partly on historical (secondary) source material and partly on empirical data collected during our field work. No study of contemporary agrarian society is complete unless it takes into the account the historical evolution of agrarian social structure and class relations in the area of one's concern. To that extent we have used historical material on Jalpaiguri district, but our intention is not to present a systematic agrarian history of the district. We have only

highlighted (in Chapter III) the main features of the changing agrarian class composition and relations in the district from time to time.

Apart from the interest in the historical evolution, we are also concerned with the present day class structure and class relations i.e. as they exist in the contemporary agrarian society in Jalpaiguri district. For this purpose, we selected two villages - one each from the subsistence and plantation settings of the district and conducted our field work to collect data on land ownership, patterns of tenurial and sharecropping arrangements, labour utilization and wage structure, inputs in agriculture, credit and marketing and also on the relations between classes that are local dominant (in terms of land control) and those who differentially depend on them. 195 out of 203 households of 'owners', 'sharecroppers' and 'agricultural labourers' (by primary occupation) from 8 hamlets of Sanyasikata (subsistence) village have been interviewed for this purpose. Similarly, 85 households of plantation labourers from 4 habitations of the Meenglas Tea Estate have been contacted and interviewed in course of the field work investigation.

Social scientists have tended to use two alternative models for studying the agrarian social structure and relations in rural India. One of these - the Marxian framework takes into account social categories and arrangements on land in relation to the means of production (as the criterion of class identification). The other model - the Jajmani types - takes into account the patron-client relations and the mutual dependence between land controller

and land users, channelised and regulated through the traditional mechanisms of caste and economic division of labour in village India.

We have used the Marxian conceptual framework and our choice is influenced by the fact that caste-system as such was not found to be a major component and determinant of social stratification and inequality in both the subsistence and the plantation villages in our study. Our framework is Marxian only in the sense that primarily economic criteria have been used for identification of class structure and class relations. Nevertheless, we have not used the simplistic categories of 'owners' and 'nonowners' but have attempted to understand the complexities of social inequalities arising within the structure of land control and land use. The basic concept of 'class' has, however, been taken from Marx and in our study it connotes Marx's notion of 'class in itself' only.

The dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapter I gives a brief account of how the interest of sociologists and social anthropologists, particularly in India has shifted from the community studies of peasant society and culture to studies of agrarian social structure and change. Chapter I also brings out the main objectives of this study, its theoretical and conceptual framework and provides operational definitions of the key concepts like 'class subsistence' (peasant) and 'plantation' settings. Chapter II describes the setting of the two villages selected for the purpose of the detailed field work enquiry, and also the methodology and techniques of data collection in this study.

We have traced the historical development of agrarian social structure, class relations and change in the district from time to time in Chapter III. It has been found that the practice of leasing in and leasing out was fairly established as early as the formation of the Jalpaiguri district in 1869, and was more firmly entrenched in the permanently settled parts as compared to temporarily settled parts of the district. Such a practice had continued and in fact had become widespread even after the introduction of large scale capitalistic plantation agriculture in 1874. Initially the classes of intermediaries, having differential legal rights in land, got their lands cultivated mainly through sharecroppers although some of them did cultivate a part of their lands themselves. Adhiars (sharecroppers) constituted the most numerous social category at the bottom of agrarian hierarchy in the subsistence setting. Such social arrangements on land remained almost intact until 1950's when the existing agrarian social structure in Jalpaiguri began to undergo series of changes.

In the plantation sector, on the other hand, production of tea was carried out by enterprises that closely resembled modern industrial enterprises. Here land and labour were centrally controlled and coordinated as in any commercial-capitalist organisation. The plantation being closely tied to processing plant and to the world of marketing, required a kind of vertical integration of agricultural and nonagricultural work activity. Therefore, the class composition and class relations that emerged in the plantation sector differed considerably from those in the subsistence sector.

The class structure in the plantation hence mainly consisted of the managers (initially mostly the British), the babus (clerks and assistants mostly Bengalees) and the plantation labourers almost entirely tribal and Nepali migrants — the erstwhile peasant cultivators who reproduced the labour power in plantations.

Chapters IV and V give detailed, but separate, accounts of the class structure and class relations as they obtain today in the two (the subsistence and the plantation) villages in Jalpaiguri district. Chapter IV covers a discussion on the subsistence village; here we have proceeded on the basis of how the respondent basically identified themselves, whether as 'land owners', 'sharecroppers' or as 'agricultural labourers'. Then we have attempted to identify agrarian classes on the basis of the nature of rights held in land, size of family holding, per capita holding and finally on the basis of per capita gross income of the households studied. The last has been taken as the most comprehensive and adequate criterion for our purpose. Accordingly, the households in the village Sanyasikata have been divided into four class categories: the 'rich', 'substantial', 'subsistence' and the 'poor' peasants. The class of rich peasants consists mainly of the 'owner household' with only two exceptions. Similarly, cases of either sharecropper or labourers have also been found in the classes of 'substantial' and 'subsistence' peasant on the criterion of per capita income. The bulk of 'owners', 'sharecroppers' and 'agricultural labourers' however, constitute the most numerous class of 'poor' peasants. Probing the way cultivation is carried out and the kind of class

relations that emerge from the production process, it has been found that leasing in and leasing out of land on sharecropping arrangements is still one of the prevalent modes practised in the district though it is now declining. The sharecropping contracts are oral without exception; a sharecropper has to contribute almost all the inputs (except seeds) to the production process but he receives only half a share of the produce regardless of what the existing law stipulates. The other mode of cultivation prevalent in the subsistence village is to get the land cultivated through the wage labour hired either on yearly or on daily rate basis. Those having large size land-holdings tend to have yearly employed farm servants; daily wagers are more commonly hired by those with smaller holdings and who need labour only in addition to their family labour. But daily wagers are also required by those with large holdings over and above their yearly employed servants. However, in Sanyasikata, the third mode - namely self-cultivation of holdings primarily for family subsistence still dominates; nevertheless the pre-capitalist form of adhiari (sharecrop) cultivation still looms large, and though an incipient development of commercial-capitalist agriculture through hired labour has begun to show up within the subsistence framework of Sanyasikata.

The fifth chapter outlines the social structure of the plantation village - the Meenglas Tea Estate's (its four habitations only). In spite of the fact that capitalist enterprise in plantations in Jalpaiguri is nearly 104 years old, the class composition in the social structure of the plantation here shows little or no

change. Even today, a plantation social structure mainly consists of three classes, viz. the managers, the babus and the plantation labourers. The last is quite a heterogeneous social category not only in terms of the nature of work performed and actual wages (remuneration) received by labourers but also in terms of the differentiation of gross household income with the result that the entire households of plantation labourers had to be classified into four categories: the 'rich', 'substantial', 'subsistence' and the 'poor'. Social relationships of one social category with another are mainly patterned on, if not determined by, the organisational hierarchy of the enterprise. Thus, the labourers come in direct contact not so much with the managerial class, as with the clerical staff which is responsible for maintaining the record of tea leaves labourers collect daily, for that determines the weekly wages, rationing quota distribution, and so on.

In Chapter VI we have compared and contrasted the class composition and class relations in the two settings i.e. the two villages that are so remarkably different. In fact we found that the only comparable social categories in the two social structures are those of agricultural labourers in Sanyasikata and the plantation labourers of the Meenglas Tea Estate. The plantation production relations, however, have some features that resemble in some way to the relations existing in the subsistence village. In the plantation sector; some pre-capitalistic forms of exploitation persist. For example, wage labourers are made to contribute to inputs such as farm implements at the insistence of the planters.

The tea estate management again gives free grants of land (that is not under actual tea cultivation) to labourers for the personal cultivation as an added incentive to settle down on the estate. Also the management restricts free recruitment of labourers and prefers to employ only the dependents of labourers' families from within the estate.

The two village social structures thus reflect two distinct modes and relations of production though they are far from the ideal types of 'subsistence' and 'capitalist' systems. Capitalist agriculture has begun to develop in the subsistence setting but it is perhaps too sluggish to override the subsistence nature of agrarian economy and society in Sanyasikata. What is interesting is that such a subsistence economy sustains itself side by side with the plantation enterprises which introduced capitalism and penetrated the Jalpaiguri rural landscape as early as 1874. What probably explains such a long coexistence of the two sectors is the fact that the subsistence and plantation economies in the district have been integrated first into a larger framework of the colonial economy and later in the post-colonial development of dependent capitalism. The plantations initiated by foreign investors under the imperialist protection simply siphoned off the vast surplus and profits generated by the plantation economy of the district. Since the surplus was not reinvested by the foreigners, who had hardly any interest in the overall development of Jalpaiguri district and its economy, the dependent capitalism could not displace the economy of subsistence agriculture that still needed to feed the most. On the contrary the two formed a kind of symbiosis.

Finally, the Chapter VII posits the basic features of the two settings. It concludes that changes in both are visible but they are not decisive enough to make any forecasts on the course of development, the two social structures are likely to take in years to come.

Chapter I

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Introduction:

The interest of sociologists and social anthropologists in the study of agrarian social structure and change in India is of very recent origin. Even in the West, the interest in this field of social research is a post-mid-sixties phenomenon. A new awareness that the sociology and anthropology as these disciplines developed until sixties, had ignored the vast bulk of population living in misery, poverty, institutionalised inequality and exploitation that were characteristic of the agrarian systems of the developing societies, largely accounts for the shift in the intellectual concerns. The growing interest of Indian sociologists and social anthropologists in the study of agrarian societies and change is to be understood in the background of the intellectual development and the changing preoccupations of social science in the West, though Beteille confines it to the changing trends in the development of sociology and social anthropology in India.¹ Not that this area of inquiry has been altogether left out of scientific enquiry. Economists and historians have studied peasant economy and the agrarian systems though with perspectives specific to their own disciplines in the past.

1. See Andre Beteille, Studies in the Agrarian Social Structure, 1974a, pp. 6-7 and also Six Essays in Comparative Sociology, 1974b, p. 37.

History of Agrarian Studies:

The present day interest in the study of agrarian social structure and change has grown out of the series of studies of peasants and peasant communities undertaken by some field researchers of the classical anthropological tradition. The perspectives and approaches to the study of peasant societies and communities in the anthropological tradition and those to the study of agrarian social structure in the contemporary sociology are similar but not identical. The difference lies in the fact that whereas the former tended to highlight the totality of society, social institutions and cultural patterns of peoples studied, the latter focussed mainly on the relation between land and society - on social arrangement with regard to land. Thus, the property structure in land and corresponding to it a specific social existence form of labour power were considered as constituting the agrarian class structure. The interest is thus confined mainly to the study of land control and social structure. The former type of studies date back to the turn of the century when attempts were made to study peasant societies in the Eastern and Central Europe. These countries were then, as the case with the developing countries now, faced with their poorest, most backward and numerically large peasant populations on their way to modernization.² The interest in the transition and transformation in these peasant societies was therefore naturally roused. W.I. Thomas and

2. The observation has been made by Teodor Shanin in Peasants and Peasant Societies, 1973, p. 11.

F. Znaniecki's, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (1918) and David Mitrany's, The Land and the Peasant in Rumania (1930) are some of the most outstanding products of the early interest in this area. The European research on peasantry had a set back, due as much to political development as to the conceptual scheme, which classified societies into the 'industrial' and 'pre-industrial' - the latter being identified with primitive societies.³ The study of peasantry, therefore, could get further momentum only after a new discovery in anthropology in the form of reconceptualization of society, as 'part society with part culture'.⁴ This gave a new lease of life for anthropologists in U.S.A. who, as Beteille says, had run short of small and self-contained tribes - the traditional subject matter of their studies.⁵ On the other hand, with the exception of a few individual ventures, concern for the tribes in Africa, Asia and Australia had dominated the anthropological studies by European scholars. Nevertheless, the trend towards the studies of peasant society was already set in.

Though the reconceptualization of 'part society with part culture' was provided initially by Kroeber*, it was Robert Redfield who gave it a concrete and cogent expression through his empirical studies that set the trend of the peasant studies, at

3. Ibid., p. 12.

4. Ibid., p. 14.

5. See for example, Beteille, op. cit. (1974b), p. 25.

* See, A.L. Kroeber, Anthropology, 1948, p. 254.

least for a few decades. Redfield's followers in the American anthropological tradition had found a new subject matter and an outlook; nevertheless, their actual studies turned out to be more in line with the old conventional pattern of ethnography of tribal societies. Hence, those very institutional areas such as family, kinship, magic and religion etc. figured prominently in their inquiries into peasant societies. Even when they did study economy it received only a step-motherly treatment at the hands of social anthropologists. Shanin has very rightly termed this category of studies as the ethnographic cultural tradition of peasant societies.⁶ Where studies turned out to be analytical, construction of typologies of peasant and tribal society became their major preoccupation. However, construction of typologies tended to simplify the complexity of tribal and peasant societies. Despite the shortcoming, it was Kroeber and others who followed him who made a major contribution to what essentially was the resurrection of the Durkheimian tradition.

As a result of the domination of the ethnographic cultural tradition on the one hand and the Durkheimian tradition on the other, the social differentiation and stratification in the tribal and peasant societies seldom received the attention it deserved. If such differentiations were studied, they were expressed in typologies rather than as hierarchies as evident

6. Shanin, op. cit., p. 13.

in the studies of Wolf, Wagley and Harris.⁷ Hence the network of social arrangements on land had not been adequately studied until recently. The reason, according to Beteille, was the typical orientation to the study of primitive society which anthropologists could not shed away inspite of discovery of the new subject matter.⁸ It was only in the 1960's that the relationship between land control, land use and social structure has been increasingly brought into focus by some sociologists and social anthropologists whose growing interest in peasant societies in developing countries and their political economies has set a new trend of study. Such studies of late have tended to view the stratification in peasant societies, or agrarian social structure in general, within the framework that is derived from Marx's writings or to what Shanin calls the Marxian tradition of class analysis.⁹ Over and above, the development of economic anthropology as a distinct branch of study has also richly contributed to this new trend.

Objectives and Scope of the Study:

This dissertation is a small venture in the area of agrarian social structure and change in India. The Indian rural

7. Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris, 'A Typology of Latin American Subcultures', 'American Anthropologist', Vol. 57, No. 3, Part 1, 1955, pp. 428-451; Eric Wolf, 'Types of Latin American Peasantry: A Preliminary Discussion', 'American Anthropologist', Vol. 57, No. 3, Part 1, June 1955, pp. 452-471.

8. Beteille, op. cit. (1974b), p. 58.

9. Shanin, op. cit., p. 13.

landscape has undergone considerable change during the recent phase of post-independence economic and political development. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the large bulk of India's population still derives its livelihood from land cultivation. The new economic and political forces, have transformed the erstwhile simple social structure and land relations into complex ones. A study of agrarian relations will not only be timely and relevant but will also deepen our understanding of the complex social reality in rural India.

Some studies on agrarian structure and change in India by professional sociologists and social anthropologists are available though it is not possible to enumerate all of them. Some studies by non-professionals are also equally scholarly and celebrated. Among the latter, an important work is by Surendra J. Patel who has examined the emerging class structure with a special reference to agricultural labourers in India.¹⁰ R. Palme Dutt too has discussed the agrarian crisis, impoverishment of peasantry and agrarian transformation in India within the broad framework of colonial exploitation.¹¹ Bhowani Sen, on a similar line as Dutt's, has traced the evolution of agrarian relations in India and has examined at length the emergence of capitalistic relations of production in Indian agriculture. He concludes that semi-feudal economy continues to be predominant in India's agrarian economy despite various curbs with checks and balances.¹²

10. See, Surendra J. Patel, Agricultural Labourers in India and Pakistan, 1952, pp. 9-20 and pp. 147-153.

11. R. Palme Dutt, India Today and Tomorrow (Abridged), 1955, pp. 70-100.

12. Bhowani Sen, Evolution of Agrarian Relations in India, 1962, See preface VI-XIV.

Among sociologists and social anthropologists, A.R. Desai, Ramkrishna Mukherjee, Daniel Thorner, P.C. Joshi and A. Beteille are more prominent ones though of late several other social scientists too have been engaged in the study of agrarian social structure and change.¹³

Desai has broadly adopted the analytical framework of Dutt to examine the Indian agrarian situation and its contribution to the growth of Indian national movement.¹⁴ Mukherjee has been mainly concerned with the differentiation of peasantry and has provided a very useful model of agrarian class structure in Bengal.¹⁵ Thorner and Beteille have dealt at length on the social relationships between the different social categories of the complex agrarian social structures in India. Thorner has also given special attention to the class of agricultural labourers, credit relations and land reform. Beteille emphasizes on theoretical and conceptual problems arising out of understanding the agrarian social structure in India 'in class' as well as 'in caste' terms. Beteille has also been interested in the contemporary peasant organization and growing agrarian tension in the countryside and has further attempted to relate these phenomena

13. Notables among these are, Kathleen Gough; D.N. Dhanagare; Jan Breman; Joan P. Mencher; K.C. Alexander, T.K. Oomen etc.

14. See, A.R. Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism, 1959, Ch. I-IV and XI; Recent Trends in Indian Nationalism, 1973, pp. 89-96; pp. 124-126 and also Rural India in Transition, 1961.

15. Ramkrishna Mukherjee, The Dynamics of A Rural Society, 1957, also, Six Villages of Bengal, 1971.

to the recent transformation in agrarian social structure and relations.¹⁶ Joshi is concerned mainly with the way agrarian social structure has undergone rapid transformation since the independence as a result of the introduction of various land reform legislations.¹⁷ The recent studies on agrarian structure and change tend to show two distinct trends. One of these is concerned with the agrarian movements, peasant mobilization and agrarian tensions and the other issue of capitalistic development in Indian agriculture which has been dealt at length elsewhere in this chapter.¹⁸

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16. Daniel Thorner, The Agrarian Prospect in India, 1976; also Daniel & Alice Thorner, Land and Labour in India, 1962; Beteille, op. cit. (1974a and 1974b).
 17. P.C. Joshi, Land Reforms in India: Trends and Perspectives, 1975; also Land Reform and Agrarian Change in India and Pakistan since 1947 in Studies in Asian Social Development, No. 1, 1971.
 18. The debate on the capitalistic agriculture in India has been dealt at length later on in this chapter. For studies in agrarian movements, tension and peasant mobilization, see, Gough, 'Peasant Resistance and Revolt in South India', Pacific Affairs, Winter 1968-69, pp. 526-544; 'Indian Peasant Uprisings', Economic and Political Weekly (henceforth EPW), Vol. IX, No. 32-34, Aug. 1974 (spl. no.); Colonial Economics in Southeast India, EPW, Vol. XII, No. 13, March 26, 1977 etc.; Dhanagare, 'Peasant Movements in India, 1920-1950' (Sussex, D.Phil, 1973); Agrarian Movements and Gandhian Politics, 1975; also see, 'Social Origins of the Peasant Insurrection in Telengana (1946-51)', Contribution to Indian Sociology (NS) Vol. 8, 1974; Peasant Protest and Politics - The Tebhaga Movement in Bengal (India) 1946-47', The Journal of Peasant Studies (henceforth JPS), Vol. 3, No. 3, April 1976 etc.; Breman, Patronage and Exploitation: Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujrat, India, 1974; 'Mobilization of Landless Labour: Halpatis of South Gujrat' EPW, Vol. IX, No. 12, March 23, 1974; Alaxander, Agrarian Tension in Thanjavur, 1975; also Emerging Farmer-Labour Relations in Kuttand, EPW, Vol. VIII, No. 34, Aug. 1973; Some Characteristics of the Agrarian Social Structure of Tamil Nadu, EPW, Vol. X, No. 16, Sept. 19, 1975; Oomen, Green Revolution and Agrarian Conflict, EPW, June 26, 1971; Agrarian Legislation and Movement as the Sources of Change: The Case of Kerala, EPW, Vol. X, No. 40, Oct. 1975; Mencher, Problems in Analyzing Rural Class Structure, EPW, Vol. IX, No. 35, Aug. 31, 1974.

The studies of early scholars, with the exception of Beteille, are of 'macro' nature and deal mainly with the pan-Indian or regional trends and situations. Beteille has however consciously avoided resorting exclusively either to 'micro' or 'macro' study and has attempted to combine the two in his recent works. The present day studies, however mark a departure from such tradition although they too, barring a few like Joan P. Mencher, cover largely a cluster of villages or district or region as the unit of their observation. These studies are therefore 'micro' studies only in relative sense but are not village studies in the strict sense. Village studies on agrarian social structure and class relations are, therefore, have not been adequately attempted in India. The present study of two villages in Jalpaiguri district is an attempt ^{to} ~~of~~ fill up the gap to some extent.

This study is confined to the district of Jalpaiguri in North Bengal which has some distinctive features that set it apart from other districts of Bengal. The most important of these features is the coexistence of plantation (sector of large scale capitalist production) and the peasant economy (predominantly a sector of subsistence agriculture). Either of these social settings could be a sufficiently absorbing subject matter for the purpose of study. But however exhaustive such a study of only one setting may be, the understanding of agrarian social structure and relations in this part of Bengal will be incomplete, unless the two settings are studied in a comparative perspective. Hence, this enquiry aims at a comparative study of the agrarian social

structure and changing class relations in the subsistence and the plantation settings in Jalpaiguri district.

The agrarian social structure is generally understood, in terms of rights and obligations held with regard to land and to, what Beteille terms as, 'the ownership, control and utilization of land.'¹⁹ Yet simple identification of such social categories in a given setting is not sufficient although it serves as the point of departure for inquiring into the complexities of social relationships as entailed by the differential rights and obligations shared by controllers and users of land. To understand agrarian relation in their totality, different social forces ranging from historical, ecological and demographic on the one hand to religious economic and political on the other have to be taken into account as contributing to complex totality of agrarian relations. Rodolfo Stavenhagen's definition of agrarian structure broadly encompasses the complex totality. To him

"Agrarian structure is generally understood to mean a set of institutions, norms (both written and unwritten), and social, political and economic relationship governing the access to and use of land as a productive resource".²⁰

Such a conception of agrarian social structure is too inclusive to serve the operational part of a sociological inquiry. Andre Beteille on the contrary has classified the basic components of agrarian social structure in the four categories. To him the

19. Beteille, op. cit. (1974a), p. 25.

20. Rodolfo Stavenhagen (ed.), Agrarian Problems and Peasant Movements in Latin America, 1970, p. 3.

study of agrarian must cover: (i) technology or material culture (ii) work cycle, (iii) organisation of production, and (iv) the agrarian hierarchy.²¹ All the four are interrelated but they do not necessarily reflect in order of priority.

The focus of this study is primarily on, what Beteille puts it as, the organization of production and the agrarian hierarchy. In studying these two aspects, Beteille comes very close to applying the Marxian model to the analysis of agrarian societies. However, in his treatment of the fourth topic, he tends to subsume traditional hierarchy of caste in relation to class stratifications resulting from economic divisions of labour.* But considerations of traditional hierarchy in the study of class structure certainly does not militate against the Marxian model.

The organization of production and the agrarian hierarchy together embody the social arrangements on land - which is the most important means of production in the Indian rural society in general and in the economy of Jalpaiguri district in particular. We are therefore, interested in studying these social arrangements with particular emphasis on land rights legal and/or customary and the whole range of social relations they give rise to both in the subsistence and in the plantations settings of the district. An attempt will therefore be to identify those social categories which occupy definite, but different, positions in the structure of

21. Beteille, op. cit. (1974a), p. 34.

* See for example, Ibid. (1974a), p. 11.

land control and land use. The major objectives of the study, therefore are,

- (i) to identify class composition and class relations as they have developed from time to time, in both the plantation and subsistence settings of Jalpaiguri district,
- (ii) to compare and contrast the class structure and relations in the twin settings of Jalpaiguri, and
- (iii) to examine the nature of interrelationships between the social structure of the plantation and subsistence settings, both historically and empirically, in an attempt to explain, even tentatively, as to why the two distinct modes and relations of production have been and even now coexist in Jalpaiguri. Do the two settings operate as a 'social symbiosis'? If so, whether it is free from any contradiction or whether it does generate stresses and strain for both the sectors is an important question which we shall attempt to answer.

Theoretical Framework:

The paradigm of 'peasant society' is usually taken as a step forward in anthropological studies, of the development of human society in contrast to primitive society - as the former is related with the state or nation via the medium of towns or cities and via them to markets. In this sense the peasant society constitutes a part of the larger nation-state society and surrenders a part of the produce to the state, not necessarily

through the system of market but through the revenue and taxation system, that feeds the organs of the state - namely the court and the army. The classical type of such a peasant society represents just one of the phases in the history of evolution of agrarian societies and their transformations. We assume that there is an inherent dynamism in every society and therefore 'change' is an inevitable process, no matter whether it is tribal, peasant or modern society.

Analysts of social change in peasant or agrarian societies have considered either one or both of the following factors, as the prime moving forces that contribute to change in any society including peasant society. To Marx, the development of towns and markets is of significance as it is the chief source of change in peasant economies and societies. It is the degree of linkage with the market forces or the extent of market relationships which is mainly responsible for the change in the peasant social structure.²² Thus, whereas Pearse, Mannish Nash and Shanin trace the development of change purely in terms of the degree of linkage with the market and treat the peasants' access to political power as contingent on market linkages, Eric Wolf conjoins both the economic and political power as equally important moving forces that direct the change of peasant social structure.²³ The latter position comes close to the Weberian approach to the

22. Karl Marx, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1893, pp. 41-43 and The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte in Selected Works, 1966, pp. 480-485.

23. See, Shanin, op. cit., pp. 50-72; 160-162 and 247-249.

class, status and power.²⁴ It is these two dominant but distinct models that have been used by social scientists who have so far attempted to analyse changing social structure in rural India. One of these, the Marxian framework, takes into account the mode and relations of productions. Hence, it is the relation of social categories to the mode of production that constitute the class structure of the society in the Marxian sense.²⁵ The model is usually drawn from the classical writings of Marx and Engels, Lenin and, in more recent years, those of Mao Tse-Tung. The other model the 'jajmani type' takes into account the patron-client relations and the net works of mutual dependence between land control and land use. Wiser and Dumont argue that the second is more appropriate framework for understanding the nature of rural social structure, caste and the economic division of labour.²⁶

Our preference is for the Marxian framework as the traditional features of caste system have been found absent in agrarian social structure of Jalpaiguri district. There are three distinct systems (based on modes and relations of production) that have been generally identified in the long chain of the evolution of agrarian social structure within the Marxian framework. These are as follows:²⁷

24. This observation has been taken from Gerth & Mills, Fram Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, 1947, pp. 180-187.

25. See, 'Preface to the Critique of Political Economy' in Karl Marx, op. cit., 1966, p. 503.

26. Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus, 1970, Ch. IV; W.H. Wiser, The Hindu Jajmani System: A Socio-Economic System Interrelating Members of a Hindu Village Community in Services, 1958.

27. See, Hamza Alavi, as cited in Dhanagare, "Peasant Protest and Politics - The Tebhaga moment in Bengal, 1946-'47", JPS, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1976, p. 362.

(i) The subsistence or peasant economy: In the ideal-typical 'subsistence economy' the primary aim of cultivation is to produce for the family sustenance. The cultivation is carried out with the help of family members in this system.* The village economy and society in India before the arrival of the British may broadly be taken as an example of this type although the agrarian system in the Mughal India as a whole did not fully conform to this classical type of independent peasant proprietor.**

(ii) The landlord-tenant economy: The second system which involves landlord and his tenant thrives on the practices of leasing in and leasing out that are institutionalized more by force of custom than by statutory law. The landlord tends to be an absentee who does not cultivate the land himself but leases it to others, generally his tenants, and receives rent either in cash or in kind (a share of the produce). Sometimes such an arrangement may be accompanied by an obligation on the part of tenant to perform certain services either in addition or in lieu of the payment of rent for the land leased in by him. The practice may range from simple landlord-tenant, landlord-vassal-tenant to the practice of sub-leasing in and sub-leasing out among the tenants themselves. Thus, 'subinfeudation' with a number of intermediaries between the lord and the actual cultivator and the actual share in the hierarchy epitomizes the landlord tenant pattern. The most classical example of such

* These characteristics of peasant economy by Shanin has been dealt at length elsewhere in this chapter.

** See for example, Irfan Habib, The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1963 and Narul Hassan, Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India, 1973.

practice has been illustrated by Tapan Raychaudhuri in Bakarganj district under permanent settlement which is now in Bangla Desh where he has identified subinfeudation upto 20 levels.²⁸

The practice of leasing in and leasing out over a period of time in India has led to establishment of differential rights and obligations in relation to land control, land management and share of produce. Hence corresponding to the nature of tenurial rights there have been categories of tenants with varying rights and obligation like performance of service or claims to the varying shares of produce. All tenants, therefore, do not constitute a single homogeneous class category. The origins and extent of such practices vary from country to country and also from region to region within a given country. Such variations which often have historical reasons can hardly be explained with reference to a single factor. This is doubly true in case of the great varieties of agrarian arrangements as they evolved in India. The steady growth of population and its pressure on land, the unavailability of the alternative sources of livelihood and of investments, the rising market value of land and the introduction of commercial crops, have all fostered the endemic practices of leasing in and leasing out, particularly in Bengal. How the arrival of the British only further accelerated this process will come up for discussion later in Chapter III.

28. See, Tapan Raychaudhuri, 'Permanent Settlement in Operation: Bakarganj District, East Bengal' in R.E. Frykenberg (ed.) Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History, 1969.

(iii) The capitalist economy: The third is the system of capitalist agriculture. Here, as the term 'capitalism' implies, the primary aim of the land-holder is to use land as a source of investment and profit. In this system, the capitalist land owner employs labour to cultivate land much the same way as capitalist manufacturer-entrepreneur employs wage labour in a factory.

The notion of capitalism and the capitalistic mode of production has been most extensively used in Marx's writings. According to him, the generation of surplus value is the core of the capitalistic mode of production.²⁹ But this characterisation was made in the context of the rise of industrial capitalism in the Western European societies with which Marx was primarily preoccupied. It was Lenin who first introduced the notion of capitalistic mode of production in agriculture following the experiences of the development of rural economy in Soviet Russia. Lenin emphasizes on three major distinguishing features of capitalism in agriculture namely: (i) the production for the market, (ii) the improvement in technique and methods of cultivation, and (iii) the use of hired labour paid in cash.³⁰ Bhowani Sen has adopted the Lenin paradigm in his attempt to identify the emergence of capitalistic relations in Indian agriculture. He holds that capitalistic agriculture has already been introduced in India but semi-feudal economy still looms large.³¹

29. Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 1, 1954, p. 618.

30. V.I. Lenin, Development of Capitalism in Russia, 1967, pp. 318-323.

31. Bhowani Sen, op. cit., pp. 174-175.

The nature and extent of capitalist development in Indian agriculture has of late become a polemical subject and there has been an illuminating debate among some Indian scholars on this issue. Paresh Chattopadhyay has strongly argued that the development of capitalistic agriculture had begun in the British India itself and he does so on the basis of evidence on the extent of commodity production, capital investment and employment of wage labour in agriculture.³² Sulekh Gupta has argued exactly on similar lines though he has traced the development of capitalistic agriculture in the post-independent India.³³ Utsa Patnaik on the other hand, views the developments highlighted by Chattopadhyay more as by product of the colonial exploitation and adds that the labour force in India was subjected mainly to precapitalistic forms of exploitation throughout the British period. However, she does not deny that there has been a definite trend towards the growth of capitalist agriculture leading to the emergence of two distinct classes - the capitalist farmers and agricultural labourers in rural India in the post-independence period. She substantiates her point by her study of 66 big farms from various parts of India.³⁴ Ashok Rudra admits that there has been a

32. P. Chattopadhyay, 'Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture - An 'Anti Kritik'', EPW (Review of Agriculture) Dec. 30, 1972; also see 'On the Question of Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture: A Preliminary Note', EPW, March 25, 1972.

33. Sulekh C. Gupta, 'Some Aspects of Indian Agriculture' in A.R. Desai (ed.), Rural Sociology in India, 1969.

34. Utsa Patnaik, 'Development of Capitalism in Agriculture - I & II', Social Scientist, Sept. and Oct. 1972, respectively; 'Development of Capitalistic Production in Agriculture', Social Scientist, Aug. 1973; Also see, 'Capitalist Development in Indian Agriculture', EPW, Sept. 25, 1971; 'Capitalist Development in Indian Agriculture - Further Comment', EPW (Review of Agriculture) December 1971.

definite change in the method of agricultural technique and in the habits of capital investment but considers the change as a quantitative rather than of qualitative nature because it had taken place within the framework of old production relations and class structure that have remained unaltered. According to him, a farm, in order to qualify as a capitalist farm, should have fulfilled the following criteria: (i) owner-cultivation rather^{than} leasing out of land, (ii) market mindedness, (iii) profit mindedness, (iv) tendency to employ hired labour, and (v) tendency to use modern capital goods.³⁵ When Rudra closely studied a sample of 26 farms he did not find any of these as the most proclaimed or dominant tendency in agriculture. In the context of the same controversy, Ranjit Sau holds the view that the utilization of labour power for the augmentation of capital, and not for the personal needs, is the essence of capitalism.³⁶

The three distinct models presented above as heuristic 'ideal types' are meaningful only to the extent that they facilitate comprehension and analysis of the agrarian social structure and relations. The three represent different stage in the evolution of agrarian relations though it may not be possible to identify exclusively one of these at a particular point of time in history.

35. Ashok Rudra et al., 'Big Farmers of Punjab: Some Preliminary Findings of a Sample Survey', EPW (Review of Agriculture), September 1969; 'Big Farmers of Punjab: Second Installment of Results', EPW (Review of Agriculture), December 1969; Rudra, 'In Search of a Capitalist Farmer', EPW (Review of Agriculture), June 1970 and 'Capitalist Development in Indian Agriculture - A Reply', EPW, November 6, 1971.

36. Ranjit K. Sau, 'On the Essence and Manifestation of Capitalism in Indian Agriculture', EPW (Review of Agriculture), March 31, 1973.

Generally, each successive phase fails to replace the preceding stages, with the result that the old forces of production continue to exist side by side with the new forces of production in the countryside. This is perhaps doubly true in case of the development of agrarian social structure within colonial dependencies. Thus, the capitalistic farming can develop and coexist with the practice of leasing in and leasing out (landlord-tenant) on the one hand and subsistence farming (peasant economy) on the other. In fact, the combination of more than one of these forces and relations of production may also be found in a given situation. Thus a farmer producing for the market with the improved technique and method of cultivation and with the help of the hired labour, may also lease out land on tenurial or sharecropping basis. Such a practice is not uncommon in developing countries as has been argued by Kathleen Gough in case of India. She holds that there has been a gradual proportionate increasing in landlords, rich peasants and in the hiring of labour as well as in leasing of land, accompanying spread of commercial farming and the extension of marketing within which it is not possible to separate landlord, capitalist and the middle peasant sector.³⁷ An empirical reality is often much more complex than the procrustean framework or rigid conceptual scheme. However, without it, the comprehension of reality and its abstraction for the purpose of broader sociological analysis (which

37. Kathleen Gough, op. cit.; also see, S.A. Shah, 'Some Comments on Peasant Resistance and Revolution - India', 'Pacific Affairs', Vol. 42, No. 3, Fall 1969, pp. 359-361.

involves linking the empirical reality with theory construction and testing) is also not possible.

Concepts:

(i) Peasant setting: As stated earlier, the present study is an attempt at comprehending the agrarian class and class relations in the peasant and plantation setting of North Bengal. Hence, the delineation of what is meant by the 'peasant', 'plantation' and 'class' becomes necessary here.

Inspite of vast amount of literature made available on peasant and peasant societies today, sociologists and social anthropologists have not arrived at a uniform definition of the peasantry. This reemphasises all the more the complexities of problem involved in defining the elusive concept. But as Shanin puts it, - 'sociological generalization does not imply a claim of homogeneity or an attempt at uniformity but a comparative study of existence of both similarities and differences without which a generalization is pointless.'³⁸ Keeping this in mind we have to opt for a working definition that has been arrived at.

The town centered society or 'part society with part culture' is an important element of the definition of peasantry which according to Redfield, is also a system of production. Raymond Firth has used the term peasant for any society of small producers who produce for their own consumption through the

38. Teodor Shanin, op. cit., p. 13.

cultivation of land and on this point there is no disagreement between Redfield and Firth.³⁹ Redfield further distinguishes the cultivators of land for family consumption from those who cultivate it for profit. For the latter, following Wolf's classification, Redfield uses the term farmer. Raymond Firth defines 'peasants' as small scale producers, with a simple technology and equipment, often relying primarily for their subsistence on what they themselves produce. The primary means of livelihood of the peasant is the cultivation of the soil.⁴⁰ Wolf comes very close to Firth in positing three elements to define peasants: (i) peasant as agricultural producer, (ii) peasant as retaining effective control of land implying thereby perhaps proprietary right which he distinguishes from tenants' rights, (iii) peasant as aiming at subsistence, not at profit with reinvestment motive.⁴¹

Firth and Wolf have ignored the peasant's relation to towns or cities and through them to the political economy of the whole region, which has been highlighted by Redfield. Consequently, their definitions could as well be applied to small, simple and the segmented sedentary living on the cultivation of land (such as tribal societies). Therefore the two definitions pose the problem of the distinguishing peasant society from 'tribe'. In this context, Shanin's attempt to define peasantry is broadly in line

39. Robert Redfield, Peasant Society and Culture, 1962, pp. 26-27.

40. Raymond Firth, Elements of Social Organisation, 1951, pp. 86-88.

41. Eric Wolf, op. cit., pp. 453-455.

with Redfield's definition except that Shanin's definition is more exhaustive, it posits relationships between elements and hence is more analytical. He provides the *differentia specifica*, of the peasantry i.e. set of elements by which peasantry is set apart from the rest of the social categories. Hence we will take his definition as our main guide line in formulating the meaning of peasant setting in this study.

The peasantry according to Shanin consists of small agricultural producers who, with the help of simple equipment and the labour of their families, produce mainly for their own consumption and for the fulfilment of the obligations to the holders of political and economic power.⁴² The definition thus implies the following:

(a) The relationship to land - which is not restricted to peasant proprietor alone. Regardless of who holds the ownership, whether the peasant himself, the commune, the landlord or the state, Shanin considers tenurial or other institutional arrangement as important elements of peasant setting.⁴³

(b) The family farm - as the basic unit of peasant's effective control to land, production and consumption. The family and the economic activity on the farm are closely interwoven because the family supplies labour and the farm meets the consumption needs of the whole family.

42. Shanin, op. cit., pp. 240-41; also Redfield, op. cit., p. 28.

43. Shanin, op. cit.

(c) The fundamental importance of occupation - which means a set of interrelated but unspecialised functions carried on by peasant. For example he himself performs the functions that are directly or indirectly connected with his farm, e.g. manufacturing and repairing of a plough, blade, spade etc.

(d) The village structure - in the setting of a village community, the peasant reaches a level of nearly total self-sufficiency. As a result, there emerges a specific traditional culture related to way of life of small community such as the pre-eminence of tradition and conformist attitudes.

(e) The preindustrial social entity - the peasantry, which differs from 'tribal society' is essentially a preindustrial society that carries over into the contemporary phase of its development at least some of the specific elements of the older social structure. Hence it enjoys underdog position in economic, political and cultural spheres.*

Shanin's definition is thus both comprehensive and analytical but 'ideal type' construct. Hence, an empirical reality of a peasantry at a particular stage of its historical development may not conform to the abstracted elements of the logical construct. It is for this reason that we will use this definition only as a guideline although it reflects the reality existing in North Bengal more adequately than any other conceptual formulations.

* Shanin, op. cit., pp. 238-254.

For the purpose of our study we define 'peasants' as small producers who produce mainly for their own consumption through the cultivation of land to which they are attached in some way and who enjoy an inferior status in a town-centered society.

The major components of our definition are:

- (a) that peasants are small producers who use simple equipments,
- (b) that they produce primarily for their own consumption. In saying so, the marginal production for the market in order to buy the essential commodities of livelihood is not ruled out in a peasant setting that has links with the town centered economy. But they are essentially different from those cultivators who produce primarily for the market with capital investment and profit motive,
- (c) that they derive their livelihood primarily from land which is not to rule out the possibility of peasants contributing to their family incomes through part-time or seasonal work such as handicraft, trade, wage labour or any other convenient occupation,
- (d) that they do not necessarily confine the labour needed to cultivate the land to the members of family alone as Shanin has put it. In fact occasional or seasonal hired labour can be a feature of subsistence economy particularly in an Indian setting,
- (e) that they are attached to land in some way. Hence our account of the peasant will not be confined only to legally defined statuses with varying degrees of rights but will

encompass all those social categories traditionally involved in the institutionalised social arrangements on land,

- (f) that they have an inferior status in relation to the economic, political and cultural domination in the town centered economy. Thus, as opposed to towns people or landlord within landlord-tenant economy, the peasants constitute an inferior class.

It needs to be stressed that we are using the concepts 'peasant setting' and 'subsistence setting' synonymously with the above defining criteria.

- (ii) Plantation setting: The other agrarian setting include in comparative exercise is generally known as 'plantation'. Sociological literature on 'plantation' societies is however less developed. Generally a plantation setting tends to be identified as an agro-industrial system. Hence its agrarian social structure and relations have been either lost sight of or undermined so far. Nevertheless, some social anthropologists did take interest in the fifties in studying the social structure of plantation societies in the Latin America and in the Carribean countries.* There are some studies available on countries like Malaya, Java, Indonesia in the South and South East Asia and Cameroons in Africa.** In India there has been no comparable work either by

* See for example, W.W. Hutchinson, Villa Reconcavo: A Brazilian Sugarcane Plantation Community, 1954; Sidney Mintz, Canamelar: The Contemporary Culture of a Rural Puerto Rican Proletarian Community, 1951; C. Jayawardena, Conflict and Solidarity in a Guianese Plantation, 1963.

** Edwin Ardener et al., Plantation and Village in the Cameroons, 1960; R.K. Jain, Ramnathpuram Experiment: Paradigm of An Estate-Farm-Factory Community in Malaya, 1966; South Indians in the Plantation Frontier in Malaya, 1970.

sociologist and social anthropologist on agrarian structure and relation in a plantation setting. Some economists and historians have worked on the growth and decline of plantation agriculture in India but they have been more concerned with the quantitative aspects of the historical development of the plantation as an industry in general.* These works do provide some flashes of insight into the social organization in plantation settings, though they seldom deal with the reality of agrarian social structure and class relations, in which sociologists and social anthropologists would be primarily interested.

Most of the conceptual discussion on plantation as Jerome Handler puts it - has centered upon 'large field-cum-factory; historical development of specific plantation types; plantation as a system or economic institutions or culture of the communities formed by the plantation workers.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, systematic attempts to define 'plantation society' even in heuristic terms, are lacking.**

* This is the case mainly with the plantation economy of tea. See for example P. Griffiths, The History of the Indian Tea Industry, 1967; A. Bagchi, Private Investment in India, 1900-1939, 1972; D.R. Gadgil, The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times, 1860-1939, 1971; D.H. Buchanan, The Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India, 1966.

44. Jerome Handler, 'Some Aspects of Work Organization on Sugar Plantation in Barbados', Ethnology, Vol. IV, 1965, pp. 16-38.

** This observation is based on the literature on plantation societies that was available to us during the preparation of this dissertation.

As there are variations with regard to composition of social categories in peasant or subsistence setting so is the case with plantation social categories depending on the crops, the production techniques, the mode of production and the organization of work. Despite these variations, however, certain fundamental similarities set the plantation setting apart from the other rural social and economic institutions. Webster defines 'plantation' as large estate in a tropical or subtropical region that is generally cultivated by unskilled or semiskilled labour under central directions.⁴⁵ Though this definition brings out certain fundamental features, it ignores certain equally important features like production for market and specialization in one or two crops. Another attempt worth noting is by International Labour Organization. At the 42nd session of its general conference in 1955, I.L.O. defined 'plantation' as an agricultural undertaking, regularly employing hired workers; which is situated in the tropical or subtropical region and which is mainly concerned with the cultivation or production for commercial purpose of coffee, tea, sugarcane, rubber, bananas etc.⁴⁶ The I.L.O. definition does not take into account the mutual dependence of workers' families and work organisation of plantation nor the small farm holding within plantation, permitted to workers' families for producing crops for consumption as a supplementary income.

45. Webster, Third New International Dictionary, p. 1732.

46. I.L.O., Plantation Workers: Condition of Work and Standard of Living, 1966, p. 2.

The definitions cited above, no doubt, incorporate the basic features of a plantation economy. Nevertheless, they pose certain interesting problems pertaining to determining the scale and unit of agricultural undertaking or the size of labour employed whereby 'plantation' could be differentiated from 'domestic form' which may also have regular labour employed. Such a specification is normally given in a statutory legislation. The Indian Plantation Labour Act of 1951 as amended in 1960 has defined 'plantation' as any land used or intended to be used for growing cinchona, coffee, rubber or tea and which admeasures 10.117 hectares or more and in which not less than 30 workers are employed or have been employed on any day of the preceding twelve months.⁴⁷ Such restricted definition, though it may suit the administration of labour welfare, undermines some other features that are basic to the plantation in the Indian setting in general and in the context of plantations in North Bengal particular. It is therefore necessary to select the core and sociologically meaningful features of 'plantation' society in order to define the plantation regardless of variations in crops, work organization, mode of production and the production technique.

We, therefore, suggest the following as the defining features of plantation economy and society in the Indian setting.

- (a) plantation as a large estate within which there may be relative variation in size. In stating this, one must distinguish it from simple domestic farms which may produce commercial crops with the help of regular hired labourers.

47. Ibid., p. 2.

- (b) plantation specializes in one or two commercial crops.
- (c) production is primarily done for market and particularly of export crops.
- (d) the scale of production is large.
- (e) large-labour force, either slave, semi-bonded, or free (hired) labour, is made use of under a centrally directed work-organisation, and
- (f) finally it is situated in tropical or subtropical region.

(iii) Class: The term 'class' in our study is derived basically from Marx's notion of 'class' which reflects the 'relation to the means of production'. Property structure is the legal expression of such relations in the production process and class hence invariably consist of the 'owners' and non-owners of the means of production. Marx calls the social categories occupying the same or identical position in relation to the means of production as 'class in itself'; it is the awareness of their common class interests and conditions of life, and political consciousness that transforms 'class in itself' into 'class for itself'.⁴⁸

Our use of the term 'class' in this study refers to what Marx calls as the 'class in itself'. In this sense, Marx's notion of class approximates the 'Weberian' concept of class when he states that property or lack of property are the basic categories

48. See, T.B. Bottomore and Rubel (ed.), Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy, 1963, pp. 193-196; Marx, op. cit., 1893, pp. 53-56; also Istavan Meszaros, Contingent and Necessary Class Consciousness in Meszaros (ed.), Aspects of History and Class Consciousness, 1971, pp. 93-100.

of class situation. Class situations are ultimately the market situations and it is the kind of chance one possesses in the market that determines the objective life condition of an individual.⁴⁹ Max Weber, however, considers status and power structure as an independent dimension of status identification which may affect the market situation of the social categories in a given economic and social order. In contrast 'power' and 'status' emanates from the given market situation and production relations according to Marx.

Hence there is a scope of only two classes in Marx's model of class. It is to be noted that such a model of class was developed in the context of the newly emerging industrial states of the Western Europe. Naturally, the model fails to comprehend the class structure of the predominantly agrarian economy of the world. In fact, Marx perceived peasantry more as a 'sack of potatoes' living in a similar condition without necessarily entering into manifold relations.⁵⁰ Engels of course classifies the German peasantry into that of 'bigger peasantry', 'small peasant' and 'agricultural labourers'.⁵¹ However, well formulated models of agrarian classes have only been given by later thinkers in the Marxian tradition like, Lenin and Mao. Thus Lenin differentiates the whole Russian agrarian society into three well

49. Gerth & Mills, op. cit., pp. 180-187.

50. The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte in Marx, op. cit., 1966, pp. 478-479; also Shanin, op. cit., pp. 230-231.

51. F. Engels, The Peasant War in Germany, 1965, pp. 13-15.

defined social categories of 'well to do' 'middle' and 'poor peasant' depending upon the extent of land holding and regardless of their legal status with regard to land.⁵² Similarly, Mao classifies the whole Chinese agrarian society into that of 'landlord' 'rich peasant', 'middle peasant', 'poor peasant' and worker (rural proletariat) on the basis of their legal status, size of holding and relations of production.⁵³ These models have since then become as established guide lines for identifying agrarian class structure in the developing countries and these have been modified to suit the historical specificities of the agrarian class situation in India. Thus Thorner classifies the Indian agrarian society into three distinct classes of 'Maliks' (landlords) Kisans (peasants) and Mazdoors (labourers) on the basis of nature of work performed, remuneration received and the social existence form of labour power.⁵⁴ Similarly, Mukherjee divides the agrarian society in Bengal into class 1, 2 and 3 without assigning them any labels (such as 'rich', 'middle' or 'poor') using the criterion of 'per capita income' of the available social categories in the countryside as his basis.⁵⁵ Appropriateness of such models has however been questioned by Joshi, Beteille and others who view that traditional

52. V.I. Lenin, op. cit., pp. 71-90.

53. Mao Tse-Tung, How to Differentiate the Classes in the Rural Areas in Selected Works, 1973, Vol. 1, pp. 137-139.

54. Daniel Thorner, op. cit., pp. 7-11.

55. R.K. Mukherjee, op. cit., pp. 10-12.

hierarchy of caste is to be given adequate attention in the identification of agrarian class structure and in understanding class relations.⁵⁶

The traditional features such as 'caste' is absent in the two villages of our study: hence our model of class structure for both these villages has been constructed primarily on economic considerations. It is in this sense that we call our framework of analysis as 'Marxian'. The notion of legal status in the context of production relation forms the basic component of Marxian framework and is not to be ignored. However, legal status does not subsume the basis of class formations otherwise such legal titles as Zamindars, Jotedars, Raiyats, Underraiyats and so on in rural Bengal would have been synonymous with or corresponding to definite class situations. But social stratification is far more complex than the legal definitions of land rights suggest. In this sense, determination of legal status is an inadequate approach to the understanding of class structure particularly in a predominantly agrarian economy. Nor can the social categories be simply divided into the Marxian straight jacket dichotomy of 'owners' and 'non-owners'. In an agrarian setting one comes across different categories with varying interests in land having differential control over land resources as well as differential access to land for cultivation. Variations in status in agrarian setting are

56. See, P.C. Joshi, Agrarian Social Structure and Social Change in Sankhya, Series B, Vol. 31, Parts 3 and 4, 1969; Beteille, op. cit. (1974a) pp. 142-170; also by him, Inequality and Social Change, 1972, pp. 19-35.

often found in quantitative terms such as size of holding, scale of production, total income of households from all sources, net profits and saving and so on. On the other hand, variations also result from qualitative differences in the mode of cultivation, labour utilization as well as exchange of extra economic services between land controllers and land users.

In understanding the agrarian class structure and relations in our subsistence and plantation villages, therefore, we have not only taken into account the nature of legal rights but also the qualitative and quantitative aspects of class structure and relations. Accordingly, we have constructed a model of agrarian class structure consisting of four classes i.e. the rich peasant, the substantial peasant, the subsistence peasant and the poor peasant, besides agricultural labourers in our subsistence village discussed in detail in Chapter IV. The class structure in the plantation village, where production is carried on much the same way as in an industrial estate, markedly differs. Hence our model of class structure in plantation village consists of three classes: the managers, clerks, and plantation labourers. As we shall see later, the only comparable social category in the two settings is naturally the class of 'labourers'.

Chapter II

Settings of the Study and Methodology

No study of the contemporary agrarian scenario is complete unless it takes into account the historical evolution of the class structure and class relations in the area of one's concern. Accordingly, the present study is prefaced by an account of the historical development of agrarian class structure in the Jalpaiguri district. In doing so, our intention is not to present a systematic agrarian history of the district but only to highlight the major changing features of the agrarian class composition in the district from time to time and to identify the socio-economic forces that account for the changes.

In presenting this historical analysis in Chapter III, we have mainly relied on the secondary sources knowing fully well the limitations of using such sources. First, not all the relevant secondary source material was readily available to us. Furthermore any extensive and intensive handling of such sources would have been quite time consuming since reconstruction of the agrarian history of Jalpaiguri was not our primary objective. Therefore, we had to rely on few but very authentic sources for tracing the historical evolution. Above all, the secondary source material have been used only to the extent that it was necessary to build up the central problematics and argument of our study. There is, however, an ample scope for further substantiation of our

agreement by using additional sources but that task per se must be left to some other researchers.

The sources used for this purpose may be classified into two categories. The first, consists of official sources such as censuses, reports, and gazetteers - the most important among which are the following:

- (i) Imperial and District Gazetteers of Bengal.
- (ii) Jalpaiguri Land Survey and Settlement Reports.
- (iii) State and District Census Reports.
- (iv) Reports of the Various Enquiry Commission such as - (a) Report of the Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, (b) Royal Commission on Labour in India, (c) Report of the Land Revenue Commission, (d) Agricultural Statistics by Plot to Plot Enumeration, (e) Report on an Enquiry into Condition of Labour in Plantation in India, (f) Plantation Enquiry Commission.

The second category consists of various empirical studies and accounts by administrators, historians, economists, sociologists, social anthropologists and others. The details of both the sources and accounts are given in the bibliography at the end.

Field Work Setting:

(i) The Subsistence Setting:

The major part of our study is mainly concerned with the agrarian class structure and class relations as they exist today. For this purpose, field work was carried out in two villages - one

each from the subsistence and plantation settings of the Jalpaiguri district. The term 'village' is used here in the sense it is often used in the revenue administration and not as a unit of habitation as it is commonly understood. In fact, the unit of habitation does not coincide with the unit of revenue administration in northern parts of Bengal. As early as 1911, it was observed that the village community could scarcely be said to exist in this part of Bengal as the countryside was divided into small hamlets. The most important homestead belonged to substantial farmers i.e. jotedar or chukanidar and the houses of their relatives, under tenants and farm labourers surrounded the homestead of jotedars or chukanidars if the jotedars were absentees.¹ This description resembles somewhat to the village structure and habitation as presented by Eric J. Miller in his study of North Kerala villages. Miller had added that the Malayali preferred the privacy of his own fenced compound at a distance from his neighbours.²

The reasons for the scattered nature of habitations in Jalpaiguri are obvious. Firstly, the habitation invariably centered around a jot cultivated by the jotedar with the help of his relatives or tenants and whose dwellings encircled around his homestead.³ Jot is a piece land settled with a jotedar or tenant-in-chief either by the government or the zamindar, as the case may

1. John F. Gruning, Jalpaiguri District Gazetteer, 1911, p. 33.
2. See, Eric J. Miller, Village Structure in North Kerala, in Srinivas (ed.), India's Village, 1960, pp. 42-55; also 'Caste and Territory in Malabar' in 'American Anthropologist', Vol. 56, No. 3, 1954, pp. 410-420.
3. Government of Bengal (henceforth GOB), Report on the Census of the District of Jalpaiguri, 1891, p. 1

be. The number of households so settled have, however, multiplied in course of time either due to the settlement of new immigrants in the jot land or more commonly due to fission of the existing households. As a result, the village structure in North Bengal neither corresponds perfectly to the account of the dispersed village as given by Miller nor to the account of nucleated villages as presented by many pioneering social anthropologists.⁴

There is another way and very important indeed - in which the village structure in the North Bengal differs from the rest of village India. The occupational division of labour leading to complementarity of castes in the village social organization or the jajmani type relations is conspicuously absent in these parts. The habitations in the area where our field work was conducted are predominantly Muslim population. Even in the predominantly Hindu habitations patron-client relations characteristic of the Hindu jajmani system do not exist.⁵ This is mainly due to the preponderance of Rajbanshis who are a dominant landowning and cultivating caste. There are only a few exceptions of superior caste households in North Bengal villages.

All the same villages have identifiable clusters of households that are known by distinct names. It is therefore the specific clusters of habitations consisting of households that have been included in the present study of two villages from the

4. See for detail case studies of Miller, Carstairs, Dube, Srinivas, Gough, Marriot in Srinivas (ed.) op. cit. or Marriot (ed.) Village India, 1961.

5. For characteristics of jajmani system, see, Dumont, op. cit., Wiser, op. cit.

subsistence and plantation settings of Jalpaiguri. The term village in this study refers to a 'mouza' - a unit of revenue administration - which is a settled area with definite boundaries for which revenue records have been prepared and maintained. The village selected for our study in the subsistence setting is - Sanyasikata - more commonly known as the Sanyasikata mouza. Sanyasikata as a mouza differs from Sanyasikata as an anchal; the latter is more of a centre for political and agricultural developmental activities. In reality, the two do not coincide but more frequently the anchal penetrates into the habitations of the other neighbouring revenue mouzas. All the same, the anchal and mouza areas largely coincide although they are not exactly identical.

Historically, Sanyasikata constituted a part of the erstwhile Baikunthpur estate - one of the biggest permanently settled estates of the district, comprising of the Fakirganj and Sanyasikata or Siliguri police circle.⁶ Geographically, it is situated about 18 kilometers south of siliguri town - lying somewhat further south of Jalpaiguri-Siliguri link road (see Map I). It is also significant to note that the Sanyasikata mouza is situated on the International boarder between India and Bangla Desh.

Today Sanyasikata constitutes a part of the Rajganj police circle which has an area of 245 square miles and 29 mouzas under its revenue jurisdiction with a total of 497 habitations

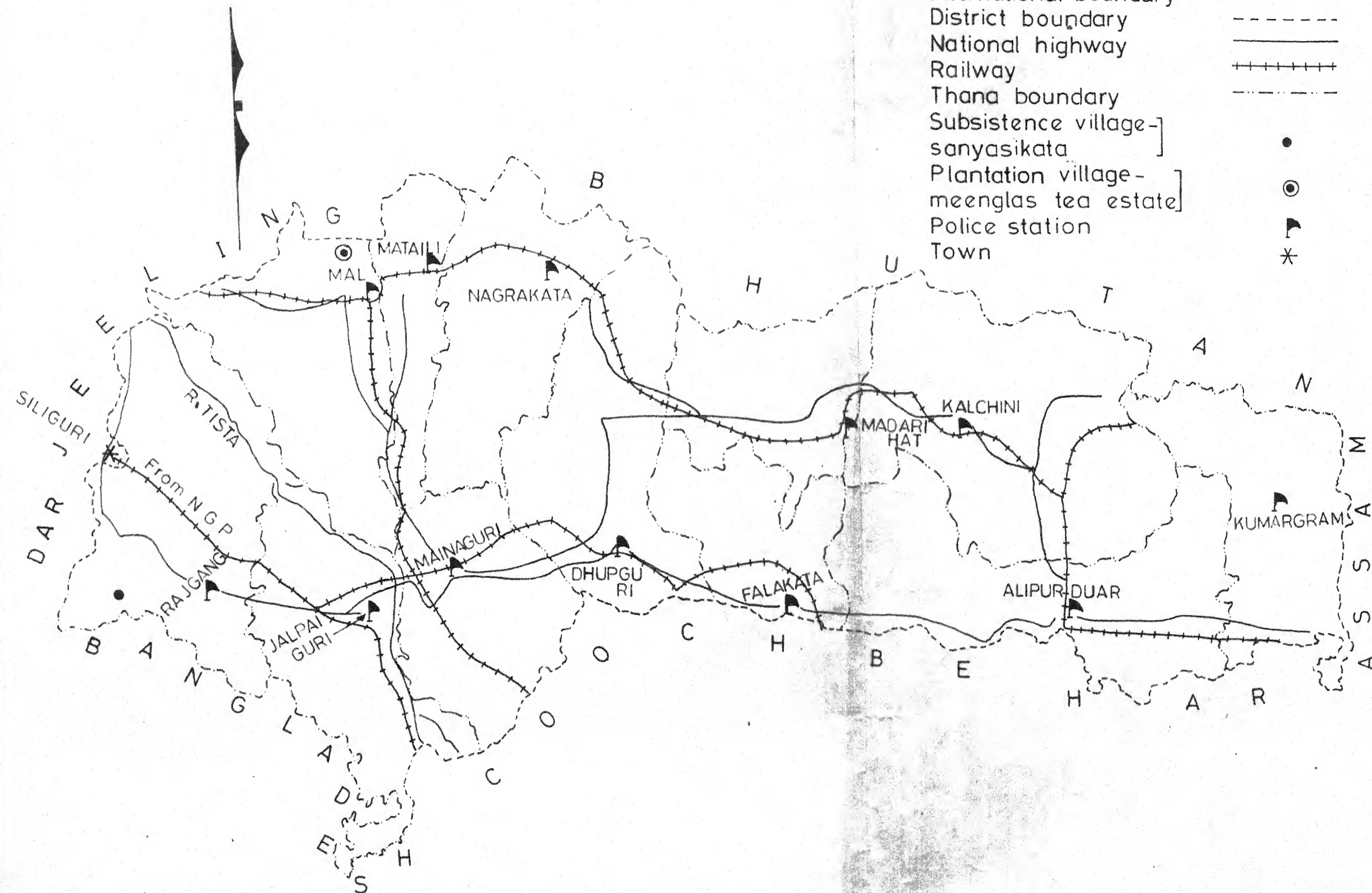
6. W.W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. X, 1876, p. 265.

DISTRICT MAP OF JALPAIGURI

Scale 1" = 8 Mile

REFERENCES

International boundary	----
District boundary	- - - -
National highway	=====
Railway	++++++
Thana boundary	-----
Subsistence village- sanyasikata	•
Plantation village- meenglas tea estate	⊙
Police station	▲
Town	*



in it. In 1961, it had a population of 80766 with a density of 320 persons per square mile. However, there was a phenomenal rise in the decade that followed and by 1971, its population was 128,744 with a density of 523 persons per square mile.⁷ The economy here is predominantly agricultural and that too subsistence oriented. In 1961, 68.49 percent of the working population lived on agriculture as cultivators; 5.71 as agricultural labourers and the rest on the other sources of livelihood. In 1971, the percentage of cultivators fell to 48.61 percent and the proportion of agricultural labourers rose to 13.41 percent. The rest lived by other sources of livelihood like plantation, construction, transport service but plantation has never been a major source of livelihood here. In 1971, there were only two tea gardens in the whole of Rajganj police circle.⁸

The total area of the Sanyasikata mouza is 14,084 acres of which 9545 (67.7 percent) acres are under cultivation, 1075 (7.49 percent) acres cultivable waste and 3419 (24.40 percent) are not available for cultivation. The extent of irrigation used in actual cultivation is very negligible in the mouza. In 1971, it had only 45 acres of land (0.47 percent) under irrigation.⁹ By and large, the quality of land is uniform all over the mouza.

7. Government of West Bengal (henceforth GWB), District Census Handbook, Jalpaiguri, Census 1961, p. 29; also Census 1971, p. 3.

8. GWB, op. cit., Census 1961, pp. 52-53; Census 1971, pp. 84-87.

9. GWB, op. cit., Census 1971, pp. 32-33.

The mouza has a population of 11,625 persons of which 6,184 were males and 5441 females. It has a total working populations of 3,655 persons (31.44 percent) of which 2,547 (69.69 percent) are cultivators, 960 (26.27 percent) agricultural labourers and rest live on other sources of livelihood such as trade, commerce, transport, construction and so on.¹⁰ The mouza has 26,825 plot surveys divided into 22 seat numbers as per the current settlement map. Of these, only seat number I, which has total acreage of 454.85, has been covered in its entity in course of the field work in this study. Seats number II and III which has 762.40, 684.89 acres of land respectively, have been covered only partially.¹¹ The land cultivation in each of these seat numbers, as we noticed in the course of our field work, has reached a point of saturation as there was hardly any land to be brought under cultivation. With the steady increase in population during the last two decades and the unavailability of the alternative source of livelihood, this was only natural.

Sanyasikata has approximately 90 habitations with a total of 2,327 households in it.¹² 8 habitations of these were selected for the purpose of our field work. Most of these habitations have close physical proximity with one another and are scattered over a distance of about 2 kilometers. In selecting these habitations,

10. GWB, op. cit., Census 1971, pp. 100-101.

11. The data have been taken from Current Land Settlement Map. The field work was conducted in May-June 1976.

12. GWB, op. cit., Census 1971, pp. 100-101.

none of the conventional sampling procedures was adopted. Establishing contact and rapport with the inhabitants was the prime consideration. We thus approached the field of study through some acquaintances and local contact points without whose familiarity and knowledge of the topography as well local customs and dialect, it would not have been possible to undertake the data collection work in this sensitive area. It is on their suggestion that the 8 habitations indicated in Table 2.1 were selected for the field work. The choice was fairly random and there was no other bias of considerations in the choice of habitations and hence these could be taken as representative of the Sanyasikata mouza.

Table 2.1

Habitations and Number of Households Studied in the Subsistence Village - Sanyasikata mouza

S. No.	Habitation	Total Number of Households	Households Studied	Households Not Studied
1	Sardar Para	12	11	1
2	Bhogri Vita	17	17	-
3	Quarbari	30	30	-
4	Binabari	25	24	1
5	Lokhisthan	12	12	-
6	Juma Gacch	31	29	2
7	Chatura Gacch	35	34	1
8	Barua Gacch	41	38	3
Total		203	195	8

Initially, we had purposively decided to study a sample of 200 households drawn from the different strata of the agrarian social structure of the mouza, but there was hardly any choice left for the exercise of a stratified sampling procedures since the total number of households from all the strata in the 8 habitations was 203. As such all the households from each of the 8 habitations were taken up for the intensive field investigation. The total number of households in the 8 habitations of the subsistence village in our study is thus 203 and the habitationwise breakdown of these households is given in Table 2.1.

However, all the households could not be covered in our study mainly for two following reasons: (i) contact could not be established with 8 households even after repeated attempts in course of the field work, and (ii) in some of these 8 households either a female was a head of the household or there was no grown up male member in the family. This created some problems in securing data through interviewing. Hence, such household had to be left out of our field work. In all, therefore, 195 households were studied in the subsistence setting and their distribution for 8 habitations is given in Table 2.1.

(ii) The Plantation Setting:

As in the case of the subsistence village, the plantation village was also taken in the administrative sense. A village in the plantation sector usually coincides with an estate as its natural boundaries are recognised as the actual jurisdiction of

the village. Generally, there are divisions within an estate - each having a distinct name of its own. These facilitate the division of labour in the day to day administrative and managerial work of the estate. Normally such divisions correspond with a residential habitation, or a cluster of habitations situated at a distance from each other, but usually not farther than about a mile or so from the manufacturing unit which is usually located at the central office of the estate. These features are typical of large plantation villages in Jalpaiguri district. The Meenglas Tea Estate, which was selected for our field work, is one such large plantation estate and hence is no exception to the general description given above.

Meenglas lies in a part of the Western Dooars - today just Dooars - where large tea estates are spread all over to the east of the river Tista. Geographically Meenglas is situated 4 kilometers south of Gorubathan police circle in the Kalimpong subdivision of the Darjeeling district. After the Bhutan war of 1864-65, the subdivision constituted a part of the Western Dooars district and was later incorporated into the Darjeeling district in 1867. Till then Kalimpong and Dalingkote together formed a subdivision of the Western Dooars.¹³ Earlier, Dalingkote was an independent tea estate with a manufacturing units of its own but was merged into Meenglas in 1962. Since then it is one of the divisions of the Meenglas Tea Estate.¹⁴

13. W.W. Hunter, op. cit., p. 216.

14. The Meenglas Tea Estate Records - File, Budget Season, 1962.

Meenglas marks the boarder between Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts today. For the administrative purpose, it is in the jurisdiction of the Mal police circle in Jalpaiguri district. The thana covers an area of 209.8 square miles and as per the 1961 enumeration, it had a population of 135,117 persons which had risen to 166,142 persons by 1971. The density of population of the Mal police circle was 447 in 1951, 644 in 1961 and had gone upto 791 persons per square mile in 1971.¹⁵

The thana in contrast to Rajganj has several large tea estates. In 1971, it had 31 such estates.¹⁶ Though the acreage of land leased for cultivation of tea and the actual acreage under cultivation could not be obtained, it is fairly widespread. In 1961 the percentage of these deriving their livelihood from plantation and allied occupations such as forestry, live-stock and so on was 55.22, whereas the proportion of cultivators and agricultural labourers in the total working population was just 29.71 and 1.97 percent respectively. In 1971, the percentage was 42.73 for those engaged in plantation and allied occupations; 28.19 for cultivators and 9.96 for the agricultural labourers.¹⁷ Thus, the percentage of those engaged in the plantation and allied occupations had declined to 42.73 and the percentage of non-plantation cultivators had slightly decreased (it was 28.19 now); however the

15. GWB, op. cit., Census 1961, pp. 29-33 and Census 1971, p. 3.

16. The number has been arrived at from 'Village Directory' given in GWB, op. cit., Census 1971.

17. GWB, op. cit., Census 1961, pp. 52-53; also Census 1971, pp. 84-87.

proportion of agricultural labourers had gone upto 9.96 percent within just a decade.

The Meenglas Tea Estate had received a lease of about 2670.54 acres on a long lease. Renewed at an interval of 30 years or so, the current lease is valid till 28th July, 1999. The acreage actually under the cultivation of tea was 1428.24 of which 1333.18 acres were under full grown tea; the rest of the cultivated area was either newly planted or was reserved for seedling.¹⁸ The remaining 1242.32 acres of land, which was not under tea cultivation, was being treated as the 'ancillary area' of the estate and was being mainly used for the purpose of growing bamboos, thatches, fuels as well as for the construction of public roads and labour colonies. However, the major part of the ancillary area was utilized for ordinary cultivation by plantation labourers. The total acreage under such cultivation was 737.63 in 1971 of which some 555.05 acres were surrendered to the government in 1975, under the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1953.¹⁹ This had deprived large number of plantation labourers of their supplementary source of livelihood.

The Meenglas estate has three subdivisions each corresponding with a distinct residential habitation as well as with an administrative unit of the estate. One of the subdivisions is Meenglas proper where the manufacturing unit as well as the estate's central office are located. The other two subdivisions -

18. The Meenglas Tea Estate Records: File - Budget Season, 1975.

19. Ibid., File - Budget Season 1971 and 1975.

Bhutabari and Dalingkote are situated at a distance of about one kilometer to the west and east of the Meenglas subdivision respectively. Each division has a well defined area of work activity and penetration by one into the area of other subdivision is rather rare.

At the estate's enumeration in December 1971, the population of Meenglas (including all the three subdivisions) was 3,895.²⁰ The state's census enumeration of 1971 however recorded the population of Meenglas as 4,414.²¹ The difference is mainly due to the fact that the former enumeration covered the permanently employed households only whereas the latter included even those families in the estate or on the fringe of it who did not derive their livelihood from the plantation or only occasionally did so and thus were not permanently employed in the estate. Hence, we have relied mainly on the estate's enumeration for our purpose. The latest enumeration taken in June 1974 recorded the population of Meenglas as 3,947.²²

The strength of the total working force employed in the estate was 1,904 in the year 1976 when the field work was conducted. Of these 1,410 labourers were permanently employed and the remaining 494 were temporarily. There are 590 male labourers, 718 female and 102 children permanently employed as compared to 72 males, 231 females and 191 children workers employed on a temporary basis by the estate.²³

20. Ibid., File - Budget Season, 1972.

21. GWB, op. cit., Census 1971, pp. 100-101.

22. The Meenglas Tea Estate Records: File - Budget Season, 1975.

23. Ibid., File - Garden Labour Position.

The total number of households in Meenglas in 1976 was 834 of which 488 (i.e. over 58 percent) were in Meenglas division, 239 in Dalingkote and 107 in Bhutabari.²⁴ Though field work was conducted in the Meenglas subdivision, the other divisions were also occasionally visited to deepen our understanding of the plantation setting in general. The divisions comprise of one or more habitations and the cluster of households that form the habitation is known as 'lines' in the Meenglas estate. There are in all 9 lines in the Meenglas subdivision situated at some distance and separated from each other by garden, road, stream etc. Of the 9 habitations (lines), 4 were selected for the purpose of field work. In selecting these, three major considerations were kept in mind. First, the sample of the households of plantation labourers had to be approximately the same as that of agricultural labourer households in the subsistence village. Secondly as far as possible, a similar procedure in the selection of households had to be adopted as in the case of the subsistence village. Thirdly and most importantly, an adequate degree of rapport and an easy accessibility of the habitations to be studied were absolutely indispensable.

Originally it was decided to study all the 76 households of Munshi line. This habitation as we discovered later, is a stronghold of the Communist Party (Marxist). During the six months preceding our field work, there had been a couple of political murders in the estate. The atmosphere in the Munshi line was quite

24. Ibid., File - Household Firewood Distribution.

tense and the inhabitants were naturally suspicious of and reluctant to open up with any outsider. That line had to be abandoned due to these unforeseen problems in the establishment of rapport with the inhabitants. We, therefore, decided to select 4 habitations, which were contiguous with each other and where the take off in our field work turned at to be quite smooth.

We decided to study all the households from 3 habitations in the Meenglas subdivision namely Remish, Maku and Madrasi lines. However as households with female heads could not be included in the field work for the reasons mentioned earlier, they were replaced by selecting households from the nearest habitations - land line. Moreover, a few households could not be contacted and they too were replaced by new households from the Daud line. In all 11 such households were selected from the Daud line on the basis of first contact with the respondents. The final outcome of the households studied from these 4 habitations is given in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2

Habitations and Number of Households Studied in the Plantation Village - The Meenglas Tea Estate

S. No.	Habitation	Total Number of Households	Households Studied	Households Not Studied
1	Remish line	31	26	5
2	Maku line	16	15	1
3	Madrasi line	38	33	5
4	Daud line	29	11	18
Total		114	85	29

Our first exposure to the field of enquiry came in the months of September-October 1975, when we visited Sanyasikata and Meenglas Tea Estate as well as their adjoining areas. This visit was purely exploratory in the sense that besides getting familiar with the field setting, the purpose was to establish contact with the key people through some acquaintances. During this trip, we visited a number of habitations with a view to explore possibilities of undertaking full scale field investigation at a later stage.

The actual field work was conducted in three phases. The first phase started in March 1976 and lasted for 15 days. This stay in the field was mainly used for pretesting interview schedules and getting in touch with some of the residents of habitations that had been chosen from the two villages as shown in Tables 2.1 and 2.2. The major part of our field work was carried out in the second phase - from the beginning of May till the first week of August 1976 during which the researcher stayed in the subsistence village for about 2 months and in the plantation village for one month or so. It was during the second phase that most of the data was collected through intensive interviewing of the heads of the households. Whereas all the households from the habitations selected in Sanyasikata were contacted and interviewed during this phase, time was not adequate to complete similar exercise in the plantation village. The tea leaf plucking operations normally begin in June but they are in full swing between beginning of July and end of August. Since, the plantation labourers were busy in these operations, the pace of our field work had slowed down.

mode of labour utilization; utilization of agricultural surplus; net work of rural credit and access to credit sources and urban and market linkage besides routine data on personal identification characteristics. In contrast, from agricultural and plantation labourers - data were collected on items like the nature of employment; wage rates; mode of payment; work performed; extra wage services and benefits; indebtedness; migration, previous landholding as well as present landholding if any with nature of rights and their relations with other social classes. The rationale in selecting these items have been that these were some of the important indicators reflecting on the means as well as relations of production in the subsistence and plantation settings.

Though the data was mainly collected with the help of interview schedule, 'observation' was an equally important source of data and insights. Intensive field observation was in a way possible as we stayed in the two villages during the whole period of our field work. Technically the observation was 'non-participant' and every attempt was made to see and perceive the complex social reality and record the impressions later as objectively as possible. Thus field observation supplemented our data collection in many ways as not all the relevant and pertinent information could be obtained through formal interviews. Observation also helped us verify the authenticity of oral responses given by interviewers. Outside formal interviews, we had an opportunity to meet and talk to inhabitants informally and these informal contacts were extremely rewarding in indirectly checking the veracity of information given

by respondents in formal interviews. We had to exercise great caution in doing so since it involved risk of misunderstanding between the researcher and respondents and also among the respondents themselves. This was carefully avoided.

The field work on the whole went quite smoothly in both the settings. Initially, there was some problem in the plantation sector which has already been referred to. As a result, a habitation initially chosen for field work survey had to be substituted. In each of these settings, we were substantially helped by few persons and friends. Co-operation of the respondents, with only two or three exceptions, was spontaneous forthcoming and rapport could be easily established. On the whole, field work and data collection posed no major problem.

Chapter III

The Evolution of Agrarian Class Structure in Jalpaiguri

The agrarian economy of the pre-British days was predominantly subsistence oriented. This has, to a large extent contributed to the gemeinschaft conception of Indian village society as a self sufficient homogeneous community. The basic elements of the notion of 'self-sufficiency' according to Marx and Marxist thinkers were

- (i) the organization of the public works mainly irrigation, through central authority,
- (ii) the domestic symbiosis of agriculture and manufacturing, and
- (iii) the villages dispersed and agglomerated in small centres.¹

Those who seriously believed that such a village social structure permeated throughout Indian history included travellers like Bernier and scholars like Sir Henry Maine and Baden-Powell besides of course, social thinkers like Karl Marx.² They and those who use their work as basic source books on Indian village social structure thus implicitly argue that such a village economy was unfavourable to social change and therefore gave very little or no scope at all for internal social differentiation in village India. This conception, time and again brought home by the

1. Karl Marx & Engels, On Colonialism (2nd edition), p. 36; also see Avineri (ed.), Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization, 1968, pp. 86-88.

2. See, Marx, op. cit.; Avineri, op. cit.; Hobsbawm (ed.), Pre-capitalist Economic Formations, 1964; also see Maine, Village Communities in East and West, 1872; Baden-Powell, The Indian Village Community, 1896.

nineteenth century British civil servants, continued to be accepted uncritically, with some exceptions by sociologists and social anthropologists in the late 1940s and the early 1950s when they conducted a series of village studies in India.³ Of course, they did not deny the existence of some tillers, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers working for a few rich households in the villages but these were taken more as exceptions.⁴ The absence of sharp differences in socio-economic terms in a society that was divided into hierarchical caste explains why some of the leading social anthropologists like Dumont and Wiser conceive the Indian village society as fundamentally egalitarian. Dumont in particular holds the view that ritual hierarchy defined in purity-pollution terms overshadows seemingly different socio-economic strata that are functionally related to each other.⁵ Ramkrishna Mukherjee however questioned the notion of egalitarian Indian village society not only in the post-independent India but also in the British period. According to him, the villages with a harmonious combination of agriculture and handicraft, giving rise to a self possessing, self working and self-sufficient peasantry, could hardly give any scope for the development of other production relations such as between landholder and sharecropper, supervisory farmer and agricultural labourer; therefore, not until (i) the

3. See, Village studies conducted in this period, in Marriot (ed.), op. cit.; and Srinivas (ed.), op. cit.

4. This observation has been taken from Ramkrishna Mukherjee, op. cit., pp. 14-17.

5. See, Dumont, op. cit.; Wiser, op. cit.

concept of private property in land was fully established, (ii) landlords were created from the previous revenue farmers, (iii) village community system disintegrated, and (iv) crops acquired a commodity value under the British rule that the self-sufficiency of the peasantry began to be eroded and give way to well differentiated agrarian class structure interspersed, of course, with the traditional caste structure.⁶ The inegalitarian character of the village society reflected either in the form of variation in income derived from the land, or in the relationship to the means of production namely land which is the foundation of social differentiation in the countryside. The first refers to the quantitative and the second to the qualitative aspects of social differentiation in rural society.⁷ The two being complimentary facilitate each other and pave the way for the other.

The erosion of self cultivating and self supporting category of peasants into two opposite poles of landholder and supervisory farmer on the one hand and sharecropper and agricultural labourer on the other as argued by Mukherjee has been challenged by Rajat and Ratna Ray in their recent studies. They have argued that the self-cultivating and self supporting peasant has always been the dominant element of agrarian economy in Bengal and that the emergence of sharecroppers and agricultural labourers which Mukherjee dates back to the era of the British rule, has its origin earlier but it 'continued dynamically in the British

6. Mukherjee, op. cit., p. 27.

7. B.B. Misra, The Indian Middle Class, 1961, p. 1.

rule'.⁹ Rays have substantiated the argument by providing data on different social categories of agrarian society for two districts of undivided Bengal namely Rangpur and Dinajpur. Their argument at least concerning the historical point of departure is further supported in the study of Hiranmay Dhar.⁹

All the same, we cannot undermine Mukherjee's thesis that self cultivating and self supporting category was getting steadily bifurcated into opposite poles after 1793 or so. The very process of polarization may have been started earlier than 1793, as Rays have argued, but it cannot be denied that the introduction of landlordism, private property, and the extension of transport, trade and commerce throughout the nineteenth century have definitely accelerated that process.

Whatever may be the controversy about the historical point of departure or regarding the direction of change that took place in the Bengal countryside, the fact remains that series of changes were taking place in rural India after the penetration of the British East India Company - most important of which were in the form of measures that separated ownership, control and management from the actual cultivation.

The evolution of agrarian class structure in Jalpaiguri district has specific characteristics of its own. With a sizable

8. See, Rajat and Ratna Ray, 'The Dynamics of Continuity in Rural Bengal under the British Imperium: A Study of Quasi-Stable Equilibrium in Underdeveloped Societies in a Changing World', The Indian Economic and Social History Review (hereafter IESHR), Vol. X, No. 2, June 1973, pp. 106-111.

9. See for details, Hiranmay Dhar, 'Agricultural Servitude in Bengal Presidency Around 1800', EPW, Vol. VIII, No. 30, July 28, 1973.

portion of land under plantation economy, this district was one of the first parts of India to have been penetrated by the capital investment of the European planters and agencies. Not only that the geographical location is unique in the political map of South Asia but also the peculiar coexistence of the plantation economy side by side with subsistence agriculture presents some unique features of the complex agrarian social structure in Jalpaiguri district. Below an attempt has been made to highlight the main phases of the historical evolution of agrarian structure of Jalpaiguri district.

Historical Account of Jalpaiguri:

The district of Jalpaiguri earlier formed a part of the Koch kingdom. When the kingdom began to disintegrate, a part of the newly constituted district was conquered by and incorporated into the Mughal kingdom. With the conferment of Dewani rights on the East India Company in 1765, this part (consisting of the police circle of Boda and Patgram) went over to the British. The other part known as the Baikunthpur Raj (consisting of the police circle of Sanyasikata and Fakirganj), remained under the Kuch-Behar Raj that was severely enfeebled by the incessant interference of the Bhutias and one of the close kins of the Kuch-Behar royal family. The Raj, therefore, appealed for the British help and signed a treaty in 1773 whereby Kuch-Behar was made the feudatory estate of the British. Consequently, the Bhutias were expelled from the Kuch-Behar territory. By another treaty signed

between the British and the Bhutias and the kin of the Kuch-Behar royal family, the last was confirmed as an ordinary Zamindar in the Baikunthpur estate and was deprived of his rights over Kuch-Behar per se. Later this part, along with the other parts received in Dewani rights was permanently settled.¹⁰

The third part of the Jalpaiguri district as referred to in the available historical literature is Western Dooars. The Eastern Dooars which remained under Bhutias control until the Bhutan war of 1864-65, was conquered by the British and was subsequently annexed into the Goalpara district of Assam. The Western Dooars part, also conquered by the British from the Bhutias, was made a new district. Together with some other territories such as the Titlaya subdivision of Rangpur (which incorporated the permanently settled estates of Baikunthpur estate etc.), the Western Dooars made a separate district known as Jalpaiguri district in 1869.¹¹ The district had two subdivisions (Jalpaiguri and Alipur-Dooar) each having permanently settled as well as temporarily settled tracts. Since 1869, little change has taken place in the territorial boundaries of the district until the partition of 1947, when substantial tracts of land west of the river Teesta, went over to the then East Pakistan (now Bangla Desh).

The evolution of agrarian class structure and class relations in Jalpaiguri district has to be examined on the backdrop

10. See for details, Hunter, op. cit., Vol. 10, pp. 216-223; Government of India (hereafter GOI), The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908, Vol. XIV, pp. 32-33; and also, Gruning, op. cit., pp. 1-30.

11. *ibid.*

of three major developments as follows:

- (i) As a unit of land revenue administration, the Jalpaiguri district had to pass through two different sets of land settlement experiences. Some part were settled permanently whereas the other parts were temporarily settled.¹² These contrasting settlements have interesting features of their own and they contributed substantially, though not exclusively, to the emergence of two different sets of social relations and arrangements in land.
- (ii) The trade and commerce as it has penetrated into the countryside has led increasingly to the commercialization of crops and linking of rural society with the urban centres and ports. Therefore commercial agriculture and its steady growth throughout the nineteenth century has been a major factor in agrarian social change in Jalpaiguri district.
- (iii) The rising population, resulting in increasing pressure on land, is well-known feature of the agrarian history of the nineteenth century Bengal. The growing dependence of vast rural population on land inevitably created new social categories with differential rights in land and others with differential access to land cultivation.

Interestingly enough, non-agricultural sector of economy in Jalpaiguri did not develop simultaneously with the expansion of commercial agriculture. The profits it generated even within plantation economy benefited a number of social groups no doubt,

12. *ibid.*

but since the introduction of commercial agriculture and capitalist penetration of North Bengal formed a part of dependent capitalist system within a colonial frame work, it did not lead to the development of new industries which needed capitalist investment.

Growth of Population and Land Reclamation:

At the time of the reconstitution of the district, Jalpaiguri unlike the other districts of Bengal, had a potential scope for further development. There were vast tracts of land waiting to be brought under cultivation especially in the parts annexed after the Bhutan War. Even in the parts transferred from Rangpur where three-fourths of the land was already under cultivation, sizeable portions of the remaining one-fourth were capable of being brought under cultivation mainly in the Baikunthpur estate.¹³ Clearly then Jalpaiguri as a whole did not face the pressure of population on land as much as other districts of Bengal did by 1870. The trend continued until recent times but at the district level only. This is very much evident in the density of population in Jalpaiguri which is comparatively less than that of other districts in Bengal. In 1872, when the density was 364, 417 and 619 for districts of Dinajpur, Kuch-Bihar and Rangpur respectively, Jalpaiguri had just a density of 144 per square mile.¹⁴ Notwithstanding low density, population in Jalpaiguri was steadily increasing at the end of nineteenth century.

13. Hunter, op. cit., p. 275.

14. Hunter, op. cit., Vol. VII, p. 209 and p. 371; Vol. X, p. 275 and p. 339.

The rapid growth of population in the district has to be attributed mainly to immigration. The immigration was so extensive that it was not confined to the contiguous or even non-contiguous districts of Bengal. In fact, large numbers of immigrants came from the districts outside the province of Bengal.

The immigration had two consequences for the development of agrarian social structure and relations. The permanently settled parts definitely experienced some pressure on land at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1872 itself, the average density for these parts was 320 persons per square mile.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the scope for land reclamation had reached a saturation point in the permanently settled parts. In 1881, there were still some spare land uncultivated in these parts but by 1891 there was no uncultivated or waste land except the tract known as the Baikunthpur Sal forest comprising an area of about 61 square miles.¹⁶ Though these trends began to appear soon after 1881, there was little development of non-agricultural sector in the district. Over 89 percent of the total population was still being supported by agriculture in 1901; of these one-sixth derived their livelihood from the plantations. Of the remaining, 4.6 percent were engaged in industries, 0.3 in commerce and 0.6 in the

15. Hunter, op. cit., Vol. X, p. 275.

Note: The thana-wise density was: Siliguri (233), Fakirganj (376), Boda (298) and Patgram (555); See, Hunter, Vol. X, p. 275. In 1901, only one thana had a density exceeding 500 per square mile and four thanas exceeding 400 per square mile; See, The Imperial Gazetteer, Vol. XIV, p. 34.

16. A. Mitra, An Account of Land Management in West Bengal, 1951, p. 211; See, also, GOB, op. cit., 1891, p. 1.

professions.¹⁷ It is to be noted that the data pertain to the district as a whole. Of course, this was an improvement over 1872 when there was practically no manufacturing community in Jalpaiguri and nearly entire population was agriculturist who, in addition to tilling their fields, made their own mats, agricultural implements and their clothes.¹⁸ But such development in all probability was taking place in the Western Dooars part as it was passing through rapid expansion of the plantation economy. Obviously, there was a steady movement of the population from the west of the district towards the extensive tracts of land east of the river Tista in the last quarter of nineteenth century.¹⁹ In fact, there was ^adecrease in every thana in the permanently settled parts of the district principally due to migration to the Western Dooars part. In Patgram circle, the decrease was 5.28 percent by 1901.²⁰

In contrast, the pattern of population growth and migration was quite different in relation to land in the temporarily settled areas. The faster rate of growth in these parts was mainly due to immigration from various parts (see Table 3.1).

It is interesting to note that in 1881, the Western Dooars had a population of 182,687 which rose to 296,348 persons in 1891 and 410,606 in 1901 (nearly over 200 percent increase within two decades). The total immigration in the undivided Jalpaiguri

17. GOI, op. cit., (1908), p. 35.

18. Hunter, op. cit., Vol. X, p. 297.

19. GOI, op. cit., (1908), p. 34.

20. Gruining, op. cit., p. 32.

Table 3.1

Trends in Immigration in Jalpaiguri District, 1891-1951

Year	Population in undivided Jalpaiguri	Population in divided Jalpaiguri	Total immigrants	Immigrants from states other than Bengal	Immigrants from contiguous districts	Immigrants from other districts of Bengal
1891	679,623	433,334	123,156	44,329 (35.97)	58,755 (47.71)	20,072 (16.30)
1901	786,326	544,906	258,017	95,899 (37.17)	48,210 (18.68)	113,908 (44.15)
1911	902,660	661,282	210,174	152,174 (72.40)	33,000 (15.70)	25,000 (11.90)
1921	936,269	694,056	212,024	163,024 (76.89)	40,000 (18.87)	9,000 (4.24)
1931	983,357	739,160	-	158,757	-	-
1941	1,089,513	845,702	-	156,765	-	-
1951	-	914,538	305,189	278,842 (91.37)	15,377 (5.04)	10,970 (3.59)

Sources: (i) Census of India, 1921, Vol. 5, Part 2, 1923, pp. 135-139; 1931, Vol. 5, Part 2, 1932, pp. 4-26; 1951, West Bengal, Vol. 6, Part 1A-Report, pp. 263-265; West Bengal District Handbook, Jalpaiguri, 1953, pp. Iii-Liii.

Note: Figures in parenthesis inside the table indicate percentage.

Figures of immigrants are adjusted to population in divided Jalpaiguri.

district was 143,922 persons in 1891 which clearly indicates that the bulk of population consisted of immigrants in the Western Dooars.²¹ The immigration was, however, uneven in different parts of Western Dooars. For instance, the far eastern parts had still an average density of 89 persons per square mile only in spite of an increase of 70 percent between 1891 and 1901.²²

The population was largely engaged in two district modes of economic activity in the Western Dooars. Those who immigrated from the same or neighbouring districts of Bengal settled as cultivators as access to land was relatively free and the rates of rent very low.²³ The great bulk of immigrants from outside Bengal, particularly from Bihar, the Central Provinces (now Madhya Pradesh), and Orissa, were recruited as labourers on plantations in Jalpaiguri.²⁴

As a result of the large scale immigration, there was rapid land reclamation in the district — the process studied at the very formation of the district. It continued steadily even upto recent times though the rate of reclamation varied from time to time as the data in Table 3.2 indicate.

Due to a spectacular pace of reclamation, nearly half the land of the district was already under cultivation by 1901.

21. Ibid., pp. 31-33.

22. GOI, op. cit., (1908), p. 34.

23. GOI, op. cit., p. 36; Gruining, op. cit., p. 32.

24. GOI, op. cit., p. 34; Gruining, op. cit., p. 33; also, GOI, Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1930, pp. 7-11 and S.K. Halder, Report on an Enquiry into the Living Condition of Plantation Workers in Jalpaiguri District (Dooars), West Bengal, 1951, p. 16.

Table 3.2

Growth of Land Reclamation in Jalpaiguri District 1901-1961
(Figures in square miles)

Years	Total area of the district	Net cultivated area	Current fallow	Cultivable waste	Forest	Land not available for cultivation
1901-02	2,962	1,322.97 (44.67%)	12.35 (4.13%)	637.47 (21.53%)	497.72 (16.81%)	881.51 (12.88%)
1911	2,961	1,409 (47.59%)	42.00 (1.42%)	616.00 (20.81%)	509.00 (17.19%)	385.00 (13.01%)
1920-21	2,919	1,228.13 (42.08%)	153.44 (5.26%)	615.56 (21.09%)	532.31 (18.24%)	389.57 (13.35%)
1930-31	2,931	893.44 (30.49%)	682.76 (23.30%)	511.50 (17.46%)	561.86 (19.17%)	281.46 (9.61%)
1940	2,931	1,106.25 (37.75%)	-	198.44 (6.77%)	-	-
1951	2,374	1,138.58 (47.96%)	28.70 (1.21%)	172.17 (7.26%)	-	655.24 (27.60%)
1961	2,374	1,166.03 (49.12%)	11.50 (0.49%)	173.75 (7.32%)	644.79 (27.16%)	370.64 (15.62%)

Sources: (i) GOB, Jalpaiguri District Gazetteer - Statistics (1901-02) p. 8; (1920-21), p. 8; (1930-31), pp. 8-9.

(ii) Gruning, Jalpaiguri District Gazetteer, 1912, pp. 57-60.

(iii) GOB, Report of the Land Revenue Commission, Bengal, Vol. II, 1940, p. 88.

(iv) A. Mitra, An Account of Land Management in West Bengal, 1870-1950, 1951, pp. 226-227.

(v) M.R. Chaudhuri, The Industrial Landscape of West Bengal, 1971, p. 28.

Note: Between 1941 and 1951, the district boundaries were drastically altered due to partition.

Since then the rate has declined as the acreage under cultivation, with some exceptions, remained stagnation. The cultivable waste area was almost drastically reduced by 1951 when there were just 7.26 percent of land as cultivable waste (see Table 3.2) because such lands were either brought under cultivation or were converted into reserved forest (see Column 6 of Table 3.2). Due to these developments, the pressure on land was not felt in the Western Dooars until the very recent times. This can be quite candidly inferred from the density of population in the district.

In fact, even in 1872 when the density of the district was 144, the density for the Western Dooars was just 48 persons per square mile although Mynaguri police circle had the largest concentration with a density of 351 persons per square mile.²⁵ In short, the density of population in Jalpaiguri had been rather scanty through the decades. It had begun to show signs of rapid growth in 1911 in undivided Jalpaiguri itself when the density was 309 persons per square mile.²⁶ The same is true for divided Jalpaiguri in 1931 when it had the density of 311 persons per square mile.²⁷ Yet it is only in the fifties onward that rise in density has been more striking.*

25. Hunter, op. cit., Vol. X, p. 250.

26. GOB, Jalpaiguri District Gazetteer - Statistics 1901-1911, 1913, p. 7.

27. GOI, Census of India, West Bengal, Vol. 6, Part 1A-Report, 1953, p. 173.

* The density of population in Jalpaiguri was 385 in 1951, 570 in 1961 and 725 in 1971.

The Development of Commercial Agriculture in Jalpaiguri:

The trade and commerce had already penetrated the district by 1872 though the impact was far from complete. Rice, the staple food of the district, was still being extensively produced. Though there is no data to demonstrate this for the district as a whole, in the Western Dooars, of the 80,999 acres of total cultivated land, 46,232 acres i.e. 57 percent of the land were just under one variety of paddy crop known as aman. Of the remaining, only 31,030 acres were actually under the cultivation and they were used for series of crops like aus paddy, mustard seed, tobacco and a few othercrops.²⁸ The permanently settled parts, on the other hand, produced some cash crops like jute and tobacco as these parts were linked with market towns better. In fact by 1872, jute constituted 47 percent and tobacco 43 percent of the total exports through river traffic.²⁹ But cultivation of such cash crops in the Western Dooars was either non-existent or if existent, then the acreage under jute and tobacco was insignificant.

The inflow of immigrants linked Jalpaiguri with other districts of Bengal as well as with the neighbouring provinces. The extension of railway to Jalpaiguri in 1893 onwards not only helped to boost the plantation economy but also brought the products of Jalpaiguri district into the clutches of the newly developing markets. At the same time the development of roads and transport facilities helped the growth of markets in the interior -

28. Hunter, op. cit., p. 248.

29. Ibid., p. 300.

mainly the tea estates and their neighbouring areas where cultivators found ready markets for their produce like rice, vegetables and so on. The development of communication network and markets were thus largely responsible for the expansion of commercial crops in the district. The extent of the development of commercial agriculture is evident in the data presented in Table 3.3.

It is noteworthy that the expansion of commercial crops did not occur at the expense of the subsistence crops as it did in some other parts of Bengal.³⁰ On the contrary, there was simultaneous growth both in the commercial and in the subsistence oriented crops of the district at least initially. This looks paradoxical but due to abundance of land, cultivators of subsistence crops were not required to switch over but could comfortably introduce commercial crops if they wanted to. And then it made little difference in the total acreage under subsistence crops since new land was being reclaimed constantly.

However, the total acreage of crops does not fully reveal the intricacies as well as peculiar and interesting features of the development of commercial agriculture in Jalpaiguri district. As stated earlier the commercial crops - jute and tobacco - were fairly established in the permanently settled parts by 1872 and the increase in acreage of these crops remained confined to these parts only upto 1881. Thereafter, further increase in acreage as

30. B.B. Chaudhury, Growth of Commercial Agriculture and Its Impact on the Present Economy, IESHR, Vol. VII, No. 1, March 1970, pp. 25-60; also Vol. VII, No. 2, June 1970, pp. 211-252.

Table 3.3

Acreage under Commercial and Subsistence Crops in Jalpaiguri District - 1901-1960

Year	Cash crops			Subsistence crops						Vegetables & fruits	
	Jute	Tobacco	Tea	Total	Paddy	Wheat	Barley	Maize	Mustard		Total
1901-02	59,800	112,900	76,403	249,103	637,000	1,000	1,000	2,100	28,200	669,300	12,400
1907-08	125,500	119,400	81,338	326,238	631,600	-	-	-	-	631,600	-
1910-11	-	83,100	90,800	172,900	752,000	-	-	-	-	752,000	-
1920-21	49,300	89,700	109,000	248,000	526,400	600	800	3,600	48,300	579,700	21,600
1930-31	42,000	21,100	131,900	195,000	471,300	600	1,000	2,400	39,200	514,500	15,200
1945	39,371	16,950	129,957	186,278	521,219	2,244	10,523	7,569	38,968	580,523	170,836
1950-51	34,000	6,000	133,000	173,000	411,000	-	-	-	28,000	439,000	18,000
1959-60	83,000	6,000	134,000	223,000	465,000	-	-	-	21,000	486,000	5,000

Sources: (i) GOB, Jalpaiguri District Gazetteer - Statistics (1901-02), p. 8; (1910-11), pp. 7-8; (1920-21), p. 8; (1930-31), p. 9.
(ii) GOI, The Imperial Gazetteer, Vol. XIV, 1908, p. 36.
(iii) Gruning, Jalpaiguri District Gazetteer, 1912, pp. 58-60.
(iv) H.S.M. Ishaque, Agricultural Statistics by Plot to Plot Enumeration in Bengal, 1944-45, Part 2, 1946, pp. 6-9.
(v) GOB, District Census Handbook, Jalpaiguri, Part II, 1961, p. 372.

the available data indicate, was actually taking place in the Western Dooars. In 1895 the area under jute was 6020 acres.³¹ The rapid increase in the acreage under commercial crops was mainly between 1901 and 1907, and it has to be attributed largely to the development of the Western Dooars which accounts for nearly all the increase in the area under jute and tobacco.³² However, the development in the Western Dooars at the turn of century, did not give any set-back to the development of the permanently settled parts where jute was being produced at the expense of bhadoi paddy crop. For instance, 25 percent of paddy lands were converted into jute fields in these parts between 1901 and 1907.³³ The boom of commercial agriculture was, however, short lived for Jalpaiguri. Immediately after 1907 there was sudden decline in the acreage of commercial crops.* Thereafter, there has been a gradual decline in the acreage of these crops without any corresponding increase in the acreage of paddy or any other subsistence crop. The only exception was the year 1944-45 when acute food shortage that resulted in the Bengal famine of 1943, had increased the prices of foodgrains. As a result, the acreage of paddy increased for that year.

Since the decline of commercial crops, there has been a steady switch over to crops like wheat, barley, maize, sugarcane,

31. Gruning, op. cit., pp. 59-60; also, Mitra, op. cit., p. 212.
Note: The acreage under tobacco is unfortunately not known.

32. Gruning, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

33. Gruning, op. cit., pp. 39-60; Mitra, op. cit., p. 212.

* The Settlement Report of 1906-1916, records the land under tobacco and jute as 36 square miles (about 33,040 acres) and 79 square miles (about 50,560 acres) respectively.

vegetables and fruits (see Table 3.3). The acreage for each of these crops indicates a fluctuating trend but the total acreage has remained almost the same over a long period. There seems to be thus a constant adjustment and readjustment of the acreage under cash crops and main subsistence crop of the district, namely paddy. Clearly then the subsistence sector of agriculture in Jalpaiguri had two coexisting features which kept constantly balancing with each other without necessarily one trying to dispense with the other. Part of the subsistence sector was devoted to cultivation of crops like paddy, wheat and maize, the other part was occupied by crops produced primarily for market such as jute and tobacco. As mentioned above, the acreage under these two kept fluctuating from time to time but never showed any dramatic increase or decrease of either of the two. This is a feature - characteristic of a predominantly subsistence oriented economy in which cash crops are produced to the extent they are needed to procure essential commodities from the market.

The Class Structure and Relations in the Subsistence Setting:

The Jalpaiguri district had two distinct forms of land settlements due to certain historical developments. The parts, formerly belonging to the district of Rangpur, were permanently settled. Hence, de facto landholders over these were conferred with proprietary rights and their rents were fixed in perpetuity. In contrast, the whole of Western Dooars was the Khas Mahal of the government and was, therefore, temporarily settled with the

cultivators. The rights of ownership in the Dooars was thus with the state and the landholder was technically a lease holder or tenant. His lease was liable to be renewed with or without the enhancement of rent by the state at the expiry of lease. Thus, the settlement operations in Dooars resembled to the raiyatwari settlements in Bombay and Madras presidencies. Interestingly, the differences in the land settlements matched with the differences in ecological settings of the district. For instance, the permanently settled parts were interspersed with the extensive paddy plains in contrast to temporarily settled parts which were covered with rivers and hilly terrains.

Hunter had described the people of the district as 'well off, happy and contented' and the 'peasantry as free from debt, with fewer want met by raising for themselves almost all the necessaries of life.'³⁴ Hence the pattern of a self subsisting peasantry was fairly a established phenomenon in Jalpaiguri. Yet, there probably did not exist an 'ideal-typical' category of peasant economy as defined by Shanin or a social category of self supporting cultivators as referred to by Ramkrishna Mukherjee. In fact, at the same time in 1870's, Hunter has stressed 'the absence of small proprietors who owned, occupied and cultivated their hereditary land without either a zamindar or superior landlord above them or a subholder or labourer of any kind under them'.³⁵ This indicated that the practice of leasing in and leasing out was

34. Hunter, op. cit., pp. 270-276.

35. Ibid., p. 277.

fairly established in the district as early as the 1870's within the subsistence frame work. Correspondingly, the social arrangements with regard to land control and use became complex in the district. The emergence of distinct categories of tenure-holders known as jotedars, chukanidars, dar-chukanidars, adhiars in the agrarian hierarchy followed but no clear demarcation was possible between rentiers, owner-cultivators or between tenants, sharecroppers and the wage labourers. In fact, almost every man in the district tilled a little plot for himself and several smaller husbandmen, in addition to cultivating their own small patches, also cultivated the lands of others and received in return for their labour half of the produces as their share.³⁶ The dominant tendency among different intermediary categories was to lease a part of land on rent and cultivate the other with the help of family labour, family servant or on a sharecropping arrangement. Thus the exact agrarian class composition of the district was not amenable to description in purely simplistic terms. Nevertheless, some layers of the hierarchical structure in the agrarian economy and society from its very inception were fairly established. Their composition, number, their social origin and social relationships and also the changes that took place from time to time make a fascinating study.

Hunter characterises landholdings exceeding 20 acres as 'very big' that between 7-11 acres as 'comfortable' and below 5

36. Ibid., p. 279.

acres as very small'.³⁷ Hence, this could serve as a broad scheme for identifying different classes in the agrarian social structure. Of course taken in themselves they would not reveal certain interesting features of the de-jure and de-facto rights in land enjoyed by the different holders. By and large the holders of superior rights also had large size holdings. There might be some exceptions but their number was possibly small. In the permanently settled parts, the top layer, represented by the holders of the zamindari estates, enjoyed proprietary rights over large tracts of land. The tract covered altogether 89 separate but fairly large estates owned by 179 individual proprietors or copartners who paid an average annual revenue of £ 155, 17s and 9d per estate.³⁸ At the same time, it is to be noted that, with the exception of the estates held by the Rajas of Kuch-Bihar and Baikunthpur, the others were smaller in comparison.

Below them were the tenure-holders known as jotedars (or tenants-in-chief of the zamindars) who occupied an important position in the agrarian hierarchy. In the Western Dooars as the government had made land settlement directly with them, they were at the apex of hierarchy. There were 2184 such holdings, held by 2202 jotedars tenant-proprietors in 1866-67 which fell to 1903 jots held by 1817 proprietors in 1870-71.³⁹ The socio-economic

37. Ibid., p. 276, also Mitra, op. cit., p. 211.

38. Hunter, op. cit., p. 279.

Note: Given the rent/revenue structure of that time, this average rate of revenue was considerably high. It reflected that magnitude of the zamindari estates.

39. Ibid., p. 303.

Note: The decrease was due to exclusion of the Mech tribal cultivators from the enumeration who paid the capitation tax instead of land revenue.

position of jotedars in the zamindari estates was different from the position and the privilege they enjoyed in the Western Dooars where the government had made settlements directly with the jotedars. The lease in the latter case was at a fixed rate of rent and although it was renewable and liable to enhancement of rent, such a lease gave the jotedars considerable power and independence in the local hierarchy. The jotedars' freedom and control were at least partly truncated by the subordinate position he occupied in the zamindari set-up though he could wield considerable power and influence. The difference between the two statuses, however, tended to be evened out after the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 which conferred secured and occupancy status on jotedars. The number of jotedari holdings and the number of jotedars in the permanently settled parts is however not known.

By and large the jotedars did not cultivate the lands themselves but leased them out to others known as chukanidars — some of whom in turn leased out to dar-chukanidars. Such subinfeudation was more widespread in the permanently settled parts so much so that the number of those who had acquired the right of occupancy under the Rent Law Act of 1859, had equalled those who cultivated the land merely as tenants-at-will.⁴⁰ In the Western Dooars, the number of chukanidars was fairly large but the dar-chukanidars were still fewer in number. They were, however, in the process of being recognized as tenants with transferrable rights in land and hence their number was rising in the Western

40. Ibid., p. 276.

Dooars.⁴¹ At the bottom of hierarchy were the raiyats or the adhiars - the actual cultivators of the soil who were distinguished and differentiated from each other in terms of the duration of lease on the one hand and the mode of rent payment on the other, whereas the raiyats cultivated land for a year and paid the money rent in return, the adhiars were just tenant-at-will who paid half a share of the crop as a rent to their lords. As such temporary leases could be obtained from any of the intermediaries like jotedars, chukanidars or even dar-chukanidars besides the zamindars, the number of raiyats and adhiars was certainly higher^{than} the total number of intermediaries though precise figures either for the permanently settled parts or for the Western Dooars are not available.

As regards to the system of adhiari cultivation, the cattle, manure, labour and the instruments of production were invariably provided by the sharecropper himself receiving only seeds from the holders of superior rights in the permanently settled parts. In the Western Dooars, however, these inputs of production excepting labour were contributed by jotedars or others who leased out land on sharecropping arrangement. Yet the share received by the adhiar was the same in both the parts of the district.⁴² The difference was for obvious reason. The cultivators were in great demand in the Western Dooars where vast tracts of land were waiting to be brought under cultivation. Hence the landlords had to provide incentives in order to tie cultivator to the soil.

41. Ibid., p. 257.

42. Ibid., pp. 286-290.

In terms of the nature of rights of different categories corresponding by and large with the size of the holding, the agrarian social structure was perfectly hierarchical. However, the social composition by stratum to stratum is difficult to identify in the absence of any elaborate data. But it is safe to note in this connection that Hindus and Mohammedans were the two major ethnic groups of the district around 1870. The proportion of Hindu and Muslim jotedar was however 3:1 for the district of Jalpaiguri as a whole. In the permanently settled areas, the Hindus formed 55.6 percent and the Mohammedans 44.2 percent of the total population; however there were equal numbers of Muslim and Hindu jotedars.⁴³ Among the Hindus, some high caste Brahmins and Kshatriyas were jotedars and others were small landlords. The subordinate lower castes like Napit, Kumar, Teli, Dhoba etc. were primarily dependent on land as their major source of livelihood. Majority of them held small plots - only a few were well-to-do jotedars.⁴⁴ Among the Mohammedans, there were 3-4 wealthy landed families who paid a rent of about Rs. 4000 to Rs. 5000 per annum. About 200 of them were well-to-do jotedars whose annual income varied from Rs. 100 to Rs. 1000. However, the great bulk of them were small holders who cultivated their tiny plots varying from 3.3 to 10 acres and produced what was just sufficient to maintain the members of their families.⁴⁵ In the temporarily settled part on the other hand, the Muslims formed just 12.3 percent of the

43. Ibid., p. 294.

44. Ibid., p. 256.

45. Ibid., p. 259.

total adult males whereas Hindus and Rajbanshis were the most numerous but it was the latter who were the actual tillers. Such then was the ethnic composition that cut across the agrarian class structure at the time of the reconstitution of Jalpaiguri district.

With the passage of time, the social arrangements on land remained in tact. In a way, it was only to be expected as there was little or no change in the method of cultivation. Not even the growth of commercial agriculture, let alone the plantation introduced in the hitherto uninhabited tracts of the district, was able to force a break through with the traditional methods of cultivation. In fact, as a British officer observed, 'the crop was very poor, agricultural implements primitive, agricultural livestock poorest and there was little desire to adopt a new methods of cultivation at a time when the commercial crop production was at the height of its expansion'.⁴⁶ One could hardly have expected any better prospects of change with the declining commercial agriculture with the exception of tea as was the case of Jalpaiguri district. There was hardly any departure from the quasi-feudal modes and relations of production that existed in the district till the last quarter of the nineteenth century. On the contrary, the mode of production became all the more firmly entrenched in spite of a continuous land reclamation on the one hand and a steady growth of the plantation on the other. Consequently, there was an incessant growth in the number of the different layers of intermediaries in the agrarian social structure.

46. Mitra, op. cit., p. 211.

The pattern of such subinfeudation was not at all uniform in the district. Hence at the time of revised land settlements in 1906-16 in this district, the revenue assessment officials, whose earlier experience was confined to the land system of the Western Dooars, were totally at sea during the resultant of the permanently settled areas.⁴⁷ Compared to the Western Dooars, the quasi-feudal modes and relations of production was therefore more firmly rooted in the permanently settled parts due to the large scale practice of leasing in and leasing out. Unavailability of arable land and a steady growth of population on the one hand and the absence of alternative sources of livelihood on the other, were largely responsible for rampant subinfeudation in the permanently settled areas. Intra-district migration did drain out a part of the pressure but it was not adequate enough to absorb the entire surplus population of the permanently settled parts. Consequently, between 1885 when the Bengal Tenancy Act was passed till 1916, when resettlement operations were over, the number of intermediaries even below jotedars - such as chukanidar, dar-chukanidar and dar-dar-chukanidar had considerably increased. All of them had obtained permanent heritable rights over their plots of land (under the provision of the 1885 Act) at the time of the revised settlement. What otherwise could have been an appalling process of subinfeudation was arrested by the growing tendency among the jotedars and other categories of settled tenants of not admitting

47. J.A. Milligan, Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Jalpaiguri District 1906-1916, 1919, p. 75.

and settling any more tenants by legal subleasing but to get their lands cultivated on adhi (sharecropping) basis.⁴⁸

The extent of subinfeudation can be gauged by the numerous categories of tenants who held differential rights and the number of holders in each category as shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

Trends in Practice of Leasing in and Leasing out
in Permanently Settled Parts 1906-16

Legal status of holders	Total area (Acres)	In khas possession (Acres)
Revenue paying proprietars	593,807	93,099
Revenue free proprietars	38,086	1,947
Tenure holders paying fixed rent	63,868	15,578
Tenure holders paying enhanceable rent	392,159	88,384
Tenure holders rent free	15,624	2,106
Raiyats paying fixed rent	12,795	10,714
Settled raiyats at cash rent	366,566	323,265
Settled raiyats at produce rent	14,745	13,762
Occupancy raiyats at cash rent	212	178
Occupancy raiyats at produce rent	54	45
Non-occupancy raiyats at cash rent	14,135	12,631
Non-occupancy raiyats at produce rent	2,833	2,826
Under raiyats paying cash rent	58,617	54,223
Under-raiyats paying produce rent	9,937	9,355
Under-raiyats rent free	350	278
Persons not following any section of B.T. Act but paying cash rent	444	386

Source: J.A. Milligan, Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in Jalpaiguri District 1906-1916, 1919, pp. VI, X.

48. Gruning, op. cit., pp. 83-84; also Milligan, op. cit., pp.73-76.

1 The figures indicate clearly the various categories of right-holders that had come to occupy positions in the agrarian social structure. It also indicate that (i) the practice of cash payments of rent was more common than the produce rent system. This reflects the extent of monetization of economy resulting from the expansion of commercial agriculture and the growth of market in Bengal in general. Jalpaiguri district was not an exception in this regard; (ii) fixed rent tenants were fewer as compared to tenants whose rent was liable to enhancement; and (iii) the practice of paying produce rent still prevailed which is a pointer of the coexistence of subsistence agriculture side by side with commercial agriculture. It is apparent though that in preparation of statistics, the settlement officers in 1906-16, did not record sharecroppers who had no legal protection; who paid produce rents invariably and whose prevalence on the rural scene in Jalpaiguri is a recognized fact since 1870-71.

In the Western Dooars too, the practice of leasing in and leasing out was so established that at the turn of the century, about half the area was let out by jotedar to chukanidar (sub-tenant) whose holding was recognized as 'permanent and transformable'.⁴⁹ However subleasing was relatively less common in the Western Dooars as the data given in Table 3.5 shows.

The reasons behind such pattern of growth in the Western Dooars are not far to seek. First, as in the permanently settled parts, adhi system prevailed over the temporarily settled

49. GOI, op. cit. (1908), p. 40.

Table 3.5

Extent of Leasing in and Leasing out - Trends in Western Dooars 1889-1916

Category of holders	Total area 1889-95	Total area 1906-16	Percentage increase/ decrease	In khas possession 1889-95	In khas possession 1906-16	Percentage increase/ decrease
Jotedar	384,896	544,697	41.52	201,694	265,754	31.76
Chukanidar under jotedar	128,288	170,018	32.53	93,582	130,299	39.24
Dar-chukanidar	18,254	14,291	-21.71	18,254	14,248	-21.95
Adhiars under jotedar	54,914	108,923	98.35	54,914	108,923	98.35
Adhiars under chukanidars	16,452	25,389	54.32	16,452	25,389	54.32
Adhiars under dar-chukanidar	-	-	-	42	42	-

Sources: (i) D.H.E. Sunder, Survey and Settlement of the Western Dooars in the District of Jalpaiguri 1889-95, 1895, p. 7.
(ii) J.A. Milligan, Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Jalpaiguri District 1906-16, 1919, pp. VII-XI.

parts. As the adhiars contributed little or nothing to the process of production, they continued to live with the landlords as their adhiars. Secondly, immigration, which was mainly responsible for population growth, was largely confined to plantation but population was still scanty in the non-plantation sector. Finally, there was sufficient waste land available in the Dooars. The acreage of such land, which was 19,829.10 in 1895, had risen to 71,677.13 in 1906-16.⁵⁰

In spite of this, leasing in and leasing out were prevalent due to low rate of rent. As a result, chukanidars found it more profitable to sublease in land that had already been reclaimed by other jotedars rather than invest and undergo hardship in the reclamation of the new lease. Secondly, it is likely that the allocation of the waste land was regulated by the settlement and revenue officers in favour of locally dominant jotedars, and that the land was not easily available to the rural poor, such as the adhiars under jotedars, chukanidars for the purpose of ordinary cultivation as independent holdings of their own. The consequences of such a selective treatment will be evident in the data presented in Table 3.6.

As seen earlier, there has been a steady expansion of land reclamation and consequently of the area under cultivation in the district (see Tables 3.4 and 3.5). The expansion was particularly remarkable in the Western Dooars where the total areas as well as the khas possession under different categories of holders

50. Milligan, op. cit., p. XV.

Table 3.6

Class Structure in the Western Dooars, 1895-1916

Categories	Number of persons		Percentage	
	1889-95	1906-16	Increase/decrease	
Jotedar	23,339	15,244	-34.68	
Chukanidar	14,016	17,752	20.66	
Dar-chukanidar	3,739	-	-	
Adhiars under jotedar	15,618	21,107	35.14	
Adhiars under chukanidar	6,562	10,091	53.78	
Adhiars under dar-chukanidar	-	1,210	-	

Sources: (i) D.H.E. Sunder, Survey and Settlement of the Western Dooars in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1889-95, 1895, p. 121.
(ii) J.A. Milligan, Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in Jalpaiguri District, 1906-1916, 1919, pp. XIV-XV; also Conclusive Part, p. 5.

has been steadily rising between 1889-1916 (see Table 3.5). What is interesting is that during the same period the total number of persons holdings jots fell from 23,339 to 15,244 (a decrease by 34.68 percent) whereas the number of chukanidars and particularly adhiars (sharecroppers) went up by 20.66 and 46.10 percent respectively. This clearly demonstrates, in the first place that the more and more land was concentrating into the hands of fewer and fewer jotedars and secondly that the number of sub-tenurial holders

as well as unprotected sharecroppers was steadily growing. Apparently then, the land being newly reclaimed was not easily accessible to the lower peasantry nor was there any official encouragement to them to acquire such lands.

An interesting feature of the development of agrarian class structure in the district was the growing absentee landlordism. In 1891, there were already 442 such landlords in the district. The phenomenon was more widespread in the Western Dooars because in 1895, out of the 23,339 jotedars in this part (see Table 3.6), 1615 i.e. 6.92 percent were non-resident jotedars from Kuch-Bihar estate and were either pleaders, mookhtars or Marwaris and other money-lenders of Jalpaiguri and other districts.⁵¹ Most of them had come to possess these rights obtaining new leases as the rent rates were low. Nevertheless, acquisition of rights through transfer by sale or mortgage was not altogether absent. Land market had become fairly established by the first decade of the twentieth century and some 15 percent of the settled area in the Falakata Tehsil had already passed into the hands of Marwaris, upcountrymen, kabulies and others - many of whom were Bengalee babus.⁵² Similarly in the Mynaguri Tehsil out of 227 jote 120 or 45 percent had been transferred in 1904-05 and many of them went to professional moneylenders.⁵³ The extent of such transfers that took place in permanently settled part is not known but there too

51. Sunder, Survey and Settlement of the Western Dooars in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1889-95, 1895, p. 118.

52. Gruning, op. cit., p. 99.

53. Ibid., p. 101.

the land was progressively passing into the hands of middlemen such as Marwaris, pleaders and others who had hardly any interest in the actual cultivation, let alone in the improvement of land and in the modes of production.⁵⁴

Thus, somewhat distinct agrarian class structures emerged out in the permanently settled parts and in the Western Dooars. The difference lay in the extent of leasing in and leasing out and also in the social origins and compositions of the intermediaries who had come to acquire jotedari or chukandari holdings in the two areas. However, these differences could not and did not mitigate the adhiari (sharecropping) system which was more than established in the district and has even outlived the formal system of land revenue administration. The mode of cultivation in the two areas was peculiarly precapitalistic and regardless of the minor differences, it showed little or no sign of change. As we shall see later, it was the system of sharecropping which became the main stay of agrarian social structure in the Jalpaiguri district. An overview of the evolution of agrarian social structure and different social categories having interest in land in the Jalpaiguri district as a whole from the last decade of nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century has been presented in Table 3.7.

The data presented in Table 3.7 do not fully reveal the differences that exist within each of the social categories. For instance, the zamindars and the tenure holders never constituted

54. Ibid., p. 98.

Table 3.7

Evolution of Class Structure in Jalpaiguri District, 1891-1951

Categories	1891	1911	1921	1931	1939	1951
Total land holders	-	231,026	227,526	167,396	-	-
Zamindars and tenure holders	1,797	10,316	5,744	8,675	53,000 (No. of tenures)	-
Cultivators	514,172	194,534	209,753	107,922	168,000 (104,000 raiyats, (49,587 tenants, 64,000 under raiyats) 64,259 share-croppers)	113,846
Field labourers	5,504	30,774	15,298	50,427	-	-

Source:

- (i) Report on the Census of the District of Jalpaiguri, 1891, p. 23.
- (ii) Census of India, 1911, Vol. 5, Part 2, 1913, pp. 222-224; 1921, Vol. 5, Part 2, 1923, pp. 210-213; 1931, Vol. 5, Part 2, 1932, pp. 80-83.
- (iii) Report of the Land Revenue Commission, Bengal, 1940, pp. 107-108.
- (iv) A. Mitra, An Account of Land Management in West Bengal, 1953, p. 2.

they managed their lands. Some of them leased out a part of their lands to other either on cash rent or adhi, or both. The adhiars in contrast constituted a homogeneous category in that they had no legal rights in land and no security or guarantee whatsoever. With regard to size of plots they cultivated on sharecropping basis, they still differed among themselves. Hence two types of systems of cultivation prevailed in the district - 'the tenurial family form' and 'sharecropping'.

The former dominated the agrarian scene of the permanently settled parts of the district at least in the initial stage. Later, the adhiari system became more widespread. Sharecroppers even contributed almost all the means of production but received only half a share of the produce. In the Western Dooars, the terms of adhiari contracts were more favourable to sharecroppers as they were required to make only small contribution to the cost of production besides their labour and still received the same share of the produce as their counterparts in the permanently settled parts did. To prevent any possibility of en masse migration of sharecroppers from the permanently settled areas to the Dooars, the zamindars of the former must have been compelled to settle as many sharecroppers as possible as raiyats on cash rents. They should explain why by the time of revised settlements (1906-16), over 366,566 acres of land was already under their control of settled raiyats in the permanently settled areas. This is, however, not to suggest that the adhiari system was non-existent in these areas; in fact, it began to develop more rapidly after

the 1885 - Bengal Tenancy Act, but it was certainly less pronounced as compared to the Western Dooars (see Tables 3.4 to 3.6).

The emergence of day labourers (farm labourers) as a distinct class was a late development in Jalpaiguri. It was conspicuously absent at the formation of the district in 1869. Even, later, labourers formed a small minority. For example, at the time of enquiry conducted by the Bengal Land Revenue Commission, the agricultural labourers constituted only little over 4 percent of the sample studied by the commission. The details of the distribution of their sample of 530 families are presented in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8

Distribution of the Bengal Land Revenue Commission's
Sample by System of Cultivation (1938-40)

No. of families	By family member	By sharecropping	By Agriculture labours
530	368 69.4%	140 26.6%	22 4.1%
Total acreage			
3,879.38	2731.87 70.4%	1004.05 25.9%	143.46 3.7%

Source: Report of the Land Revenue Commission, Bengal, Vol. II, 1940, pp. 117-120.

The sample studied by the commission raises some interesting questions. Firstly, it is not known from which parts of the district the sample was drawn. Similarly, the basis and the mode of the selection of 530 families are also not known.

Taken on its face value, the data in Table 3.8 compared with the data presented in Tables 3.5 to 3.7, apparently suggest a shift from the adhi in favour of the family farm system of cultivation in the district. But this is somewhat misleading. Firstly, in all probability, the Land Revenue Commission's sample neither represented different parts of the district nor did it cover sample households from the different strata of the agrarian hierarchy proportionately. As more carefully undertaken later enumerations suggest, the extent of sharecropping in the agrarian economy of Jalpaiguri was undoubtedly under-represented in the sample and was a more common system of cultivation (than the data in Table 3.8 indicate) around 1938-40.*

With the partition of Bengal in 1947 nearly half of the permanently settled areas of Jalpaiguri district were transferred to the then East Pakistan (now Bangla Desh). A part of the influx of the refugees that came from the East to West Bengal following the partition also came to settle in Jalpaiguri district and in 1951 census as many as 278,842 immigrants in Jalpaiguri had come from states outside Bengal (see Table 3.1). That a great bulk of these came from the Eastern parts of Bengal, hardly needs to

* This point has been emphasized by Sunil Sen. See, Sen, Agrarian Struggle in Bengal, 1946-47, 1972, pp. 7-15.

be emphasised. In the absence of alternative avenues of work, the immigrants must have swollen the ranks of sharecroppers. In 1951, for example, the census returned 64,259 adhiars as compared to 49,587 tenant-cultivators from the district in spite of the fact that the district was now far smaller in size due to transfer of substantial portion of the permanently settled areas. Thus, between 1916 and 1951, the number of adhiars had increased from 22,408 to 64,259 i.e. almost 100 percent increase (see Table 3.6). The subsequent survey settlement made a few years later, however, enumerated the number of sharecroppers as 72,981.⁵⁶

Since then there have been substantial changes in the agrarian class structure which are to be attributed largely to the various land reform legislations introduced in the state after 1953. Thus, the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act was passed in 1953 which not only abolished the various intermediaries but also prescribed a ceiling on the khas possession at 25 acres of cultivable and 20 acres of non-cultivable land on an individual holding. Two years later, the West Bengal Land Reform Act was passed in which the provision of the Bargadar Act was included. The main provision of this act were twofold. The first granted an equal share of the produce to the owner and the bargadar in the ratio of 50:50, if the owner supplied plough, cattle, ~~manure~~ and seeds. On the other hand, if these are contributed by the bargadar, then

56. G.W.B. (Department of Land & Land Revenue), Bargadars and Their Problems, 1958, p. 46; also Mitra, op. cit., p. 2.

Note: The figure of sharecropper given for 1951 is as per the sharecropper's statement; according to owners' statement the figure of sharecropper is 12,376.

the ratio prescribed for the owner-bargadar shares was 40:60. The second provision protected the sharecropper against eviction by landlords except under a decree of a competent authority in such condition as non-cultivation of land in person; bonafide needs of the landlord etc.⁵⁷

But, in spite of the progressive legislation, there has been little change in the mode of cultivation and production relations of the district. The adhi system was still firmly entrenched and in 1960, 46 percent of the cultivated area (39 percent of the total plots) were under the sharecropping arrangement. In contrast only 27 percent of the cultivated area was under the 'family farm' system of cultivation that covered as many as 43 percent of the plots. More spectacular was, however, the growth of the class of agricultural labourers which was hitherto insignificant numerically in the district. In 1960, 33 percent of the land and 18 percent of the total plots was being cultivated with the help of hired labour in the district.⁵⁸

From the above discussion, it follows that there has been growing clustering of the population at the different layers of the agrarian social structure - the bottom layers represented by the most numerous classes of tenant-cultivators and sharecroppers. What is interesting then, is the fact that the agrarian structure in Jalpaiguri developed perfectly on the pyramidal model owing to

57. GOI, Journal of Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy & Administration, Vol. XVII, No. 4, Winter 1973, pp. 758-764.

58. S.K. Basu and S.K. Bhattacharya, Land Reform in West Bengal, 1963, p. 46.

increasing pressure on land and absence of alternative economic resources. Paradoxically enough, a social structure built around the network of dependence, developed in Jalpaiguri in spite of continuous reclamation of land and consequent expansion of agriculture both in subsistence and plantation which we shall discuss shortly.

The agrarian social structure and class relations have until now been studied mainly in terms of de jure status enjoyed by the different agrarian social categories. The de jure statuses are, however, never simple. In fact, cultivators possess more than one right and obligation in land which is far from complimentary. Neither are the size of holding held uniform. In this context, the identification of classes in terms of legal status alone or even in terms of size of holding is far from satisfactory. A comprehensive and deeper understanding of the complexities of the agrarian class structure and class relations would not have been possible without looking into the contemporary present day realities in the countryside of Jalpaiguri. The present researcher's field work in the two villages (reported in the following chapters) was aimed at precisely achieving this.

Development of Plantation and Capitalistic Agriculture in Jalpaiguri

Compared to those in the district of Darjeeling or in the province of Assam, the plantation in Jalpaiguri was started a little later. The story of the throbbingsuccess of the plantation economy all over the Eastern-India is too well-known to be repeated here.

The first tea garden in Jalpaiguri on commercial line was started in 1874 although an experimental tea garden had been introduced earlier in 1872.⁵⁹ Once introduced on the commercial lines, the growth of tea plantation was so phenomenal in Jalpaiguri that it had surpassed Darjeeling plantations at the end of the nineteenth century. Thereafter, the growth was steady though its rate kept fluctuating in different periods (see Table 3.9).

As evident from the data, the growth of the plantation had been steady both with regard to number and acreage until the dawn of the independence. Thereafter, the number of estates did not show any upward tendency. But the acreage had been expanded mainly due to the fact that the waste-lands in the jurisdiction of tea estates were being brought under tea plantation. Hence the average size of the estates had increased over the years particularly after 1941 (see Table 3.9).

The socio-economic and political forces that account for the rapid growth of the plantation economy in the district from the last quarter of the nineteenth century are as follows:

- (i) the moving force behind the introduction and expansion of plantation in Jalpaiguri was the European capital provided by those who either resided in India or Great Britain. Most of the initial capital was supplied by the European planters who had settled in the neighbouring districts of Darjeeling or in Assam. Dr. Broughton~~am~~ who pioneered the plantation in Jalpaiguri, had already had one estate in the Terai region of

59. Hunter, op. cit., p. 243.

Table 3.9

Growth of Plantation Economy in Jalpaiguri - 1874-1960

Year	No. of estates	Total acres	Average size of plantation estate	Total produce (in lbs.)	Average yield per acre (in lbs.)
1874	1	-	-	-	-
1876	13	818	62.9	-	-
1881	47	5,637	119.9	-	-
1891	79	35,683	451.7	-	-
1901	103	76,403	741.8	31,087,537	441
1911	106	90,859	857.2	48,820,637	583
1921	142	112,688	793.6	43,287,187	426
1931	151	132,074	874.7	66,447,715	534
1941	181*	131,700	728.0	94,604,450	765
1951	155	156,200.24	1,007.8	-	-
1960	155	-	-	-	-

Sources:

- (i) Gruning, Jalpaiguri District Gazetteer, 1911, pp. 103-104.
- (ii) Census of India, 1911, Vol. 5, Part 2, 1913, p. 358; 1921, Vol. 5, Part 2, 1923, p. 402; 1951, Vol. 6, Part 1A-Report, p. 263.
- (iii) S.K. Halder, Report on an Enquiry into the Living Condition of Plantation Workers in Jalpaiguri District (Dooars) West Bengal, 1951, p. 1.
- (iv) Tea Board, All India Tea Directory, 1960.

Note: Jalpaiguri District Gazetteer records the number of estates as 55 in 1881; 182 in 1892; 235 in 1901. These figures however do not pertain to actual establishments but to number of leases.

* The figure 181 in 1941 in all probability indicates the number of leases and not establishment

Darjeeling.⁶⁰ However, the venture was not confined to the European capital and entrepreneurship alone because soon the natives too stepped into the venture. The first Indian-managed tea company - Jalpaiguri Tea Company was set-up in 1879 by a few enterprising Bengalee lawyers and babus.⁶¹

- (ii) the cultivation of tea was encouraged by the government in the waste land tracts. The newly formed district of Jalpaiguri possessing vast tracts of such land, provided ample scope for rapid expansion of the plantation in the district.
- (iii) equally important was the close physical proximity of Jalpaiguri with the districts of lower Bengal which had important centres of trade, commerce and also ports for export. The introduction and expansion of railways and roadways further linked the plantation estates with the towns and ports.
- (iv) finally, whether for mining or for plantation, the provinces of Orissa, Bihar and Central Province were the main labour catchment areas. Jalpaiguri being the nearest to these provinces than the plantations in the other parts of Eastern-India, naturally attracted large numbers of migrant labour.

The growth of plantation had somewhat slackened at the turn of the century. Between 1901-11, at least the number of estates remained more or less stationary but their total acreage has gone up by 19 percent (see Table 3.9). There were two important

60. Jalpaiguri District Centenary: Centenary Celebrations Souvenir 1869, pp. 306-309; also Griffith, op. cit., pp. 112-116.

61. Griffith, op. cit., p. 115; also S. Mukherjee, 'Emergence of Bengalee Entrepreneurship in Tea Plantation in a Bengal District 1879-1933, IESHR, Vol. XIII, No. 4, 1972, pp. 503-512.

reasons for such slackness. The plantation economy as a whole was passing through a period of severe depression since 1897 due to the reckless extension both in India and in other countries like Ceylon and Jawa that had resulted in considerable slump in the prices.⁶² Secondly due to the saturation in cultivation no lands were available for fresh leases outside the area that was already leased to planters. The expansion of acreage was largely due to the fact that the waste lands as well as unutilized tracts within already leased estates were being brought under tea cultivation. Consequently, new enterprising entrants in the plantation were trying to procure jot lands that were in fact earmarked for ordinary cultivation. The conversion of jot lands into plantations was finally approved legally in 1919.⁶³ This measure ensured a fairly substantial growth in the number of estates and also acreage between 1911-31. The Indian planters had now as many as 33 estates under their control within a span of two decades.⁶⁴ Since then the growth of plantation has been slower which is to be largely attributed to the International Tea Agreement signed in 1933 which restricted the expansion of acreage beyond certain limits.⁶⁵

The areas interspersed with tea estates today were earlier covered with wild bushes and jungle. In order to bring them under tea cultivation, a lease of a plot was normally obtained by the planter

62. Gruning, op. cit., p. 105.

63. *ibid.*; also Mukherjee, op. cit., pp. 506-508.

64. S. Mukherjee, op. cit., p. 507.

65. Griffith, op. cit., p. 191.

who invested capital to reclaim it with the help of wage labourers. Generally the initial lease used to be rent-free for a year or so and was granted for a short period of time. Later it was renewed on the condition that the lessee would bring 15 percent of the total leased area under tea cultivation.⁶⁶

The process of land reclamation for tea under cultivation in the North Bengal was not similar to what took place in Sunderban or Mymensingh where the landlords had initially employed tribal labourers for land reclamation and eventually settled them on the land they had reclaimed. Later they were, however, evicted in preference of a more 'progressive' cultivators from among caste Hindus.⁶⁷ The plantation in Jalpaiguri seems to have developed along the lines of the growth of plantations in Darjeeling. Here once the site was selected, a temporary bungalow for the planter and a number of sheds for the labourers were generally set-up. Then about two to three hundred men, women and children were hired out to cut down jungles and to prepare plots for plantation in instalments of about 100 acres every time. This was followed by digging, staking and finally planting of tea. Once this phase was over, more durable constructions of buildings both for the manager and labourers were erected. This was again followed by the work cycle just outlined.⁶⁸ The labour force was small as long as work was confined to land reclamation and plantation of tea. With the growth

66. Baden-Powell, The Land-System of British India, Vol. 1, 1974, pp. 479-488.

67. See, Sunil Sen, op. cit., pp. 1-7; also Dhanagare, op. cit., (1976), p. 362.

68. Hunter, op. cit., Vol. 8, pp. 172-173.

of tea and the introduction of its processing and manufacturing, the labour force was however further expanded in the plantation estates of Jalpaiguri.

There thus emerged a new mode and relations of production (capitalist mode and relations of production) in the district with the advent of the plantation which was radically different from what was in vogue in the subsistence sector of the district, or for that matter even the whole of Bengal. In the capitalist mode of production in the plantation, the planter provided all the means of production such as land, implements, machines, fertilizers and other inputs. The labourer on the other hand sold his labour to the planter in return of cash wages. Such capitalistic mode of production was, however, not confined to cultivation of tea only. Equally important was processing and manufacturing of finished tea which was part and parcel of the plantation estate and required large capital outlays. Thus, with tea plantations, capitalism had come to stay in the district.

In the subsistence setting, on the other hand, cultivation was mainly carried out either on the pattern of 'family farms' to which cultivators were attached or by hiring adhiars (sharecroppers). There was also clear bifurcation between cultivation of commercial crops and their processing whether it was jute or tobacco in the subsistence economy. The crops were collected by traders and were transferred to processing and manufacturing units owned and managed by those who had hardly any direct interest in the actual cultivation of crops. This was the case even with the indigo cultivation

in which the British interests were directly involved at least in the initial stage.⁶⁹

The reasons for remarkable contrast between the modes and relations of production in the subsistence and those of plantation setting are of some significance for the present discussions.

- (i) the monopoly of China in tea and the estranged political relations between China and Great Britain in the nineteenth century forced the British to look for alternative source of large scale production of tea which was not possible except within a capitalistic organisation of production. And by the time, the plantation was introduced in Jalpaiguri in 1870's, the capitalistic mode of production had already come to stay in the Northern Bengal.
- (ii) the cultivation and manufacturing of tea was hitherto unknown to the natives in India. The British had learnt it from the Chinese and introduced in Bengal its cultivation and manufacturing through hired labour under their own supervision unlike China where the tea cultivation was on a family farm basis.⁷⁰ The problems in the transmission of knowledge and risk involved in such 'family farms' experienced in the indigo cultivation that had led to 'blue mutiny' of 1859-62 were chiefly responsible for this shift in the new direction.⁷¹

69. See, D.H. Buchanan, The Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India, 1966, pp. 35-53.

70. Griffith, op. cit., p. 6.

71. See for detail, B.B. Kling, The Blue Mutiny: Indigo Disturbances in Bengal 1859-1862, 1966.

The cultivation of tea on the large scale but through precapitalistic system of production was hardly possible. From its very inception the tea plantation was on capitalistic lines. The steady expansion and growth of capitalism in the plantation led to the emergence of two distinct classes namely the planters and plantation labourers in the Jalpaiguri district.

The plantations were by and large owned by the companies formed and registered either in Great Britain or in India. Of course, there were some individually owned estates but their number was very small. The European capital dominated the plantation and continued to do so even upto the recent times. The Indian planters could not compete with the Europeans in terms of capital investment. Thus the average size of an Indian owned estate was much smaller than the European estates both in terms of the total lease and in acreage actually under tea cultivation. The changing structure of control of tea estates and the relative strength of the British and Indians in Jalpaiguri plantation is reflected in the data presented in Table 3.10.

Though, the European investors provided capital, they hardly took any direct interest in the day-to-day management of the estates which were generally entrusted to the managing firms (companies) or agents. It was they who looked after the recruitment of labour, construction, purchases as well as marketing through professional managers, supervisory staff and assistants whose services were especially hired for these purposes. The managers and his assistants represented the interests of the class of investors

Table 3.10

Distribution of the Plantation Estates by
the European and the Indian Ownership

Year	Total number of estates	No. of estates owned by European	No. of estates owned by Indian
1881	47	46	1
1891	79	72	7
1901	103	93	10
1911	106	90	16
1921	142	102	40
1931	151	99	52

Sources: (i) Census of India, 1951, West Bengal, Vol. 6, Part 1A-Report, p. 263.
(ii) Census of India, 1951, West Bengal District Handbook, Jalpaiguri, p. Lii.
(iii) S. Mukherjee, 'Emergence of Bengalee Entrepreneurship in Tea Plantation in a Bengal District, 1879-1933, IESHR, Vol. XIII, No. 4, 1976, pp. 506-507.

for all practical purposes in the actual plantation estate and therefore formed the top stratum of the plantation hierarchy in the district. Although they themselves were salaried employees, they wielded the sole authority incumbent upon a estate. Their salaries were attractive but they differed from estate to estate depending on the position they occupied. In 1879, a manager of an Indian owned tea company was paid a salary of about Rs. 50 whereas the manager of a British owned company was paid a salary five to ten times higher.⁷² Despite salary differences which were of minor

72. Griffith, op.cit., p. 116. In 1931 in the Meenglas Tea Estate, the manager's salary was Rs. 700 p.m. See, The Meenglas Tea Estate Records: File - Estimate Result of Season 1931.

nature the managerial staff constituted a homogeneous social category because economically they were set apart not only from the poorly paid plantation labourers but also from the white-collar workers - the babus. The exercise of routine political and administrative functions on the tea estate had further highlighted their dominance although numerically, they were only ^asmall minority. The class was mainly consisted of Europeans and Anglo-Indians though Indians were not altogether absent from the scene as the data given in Table 3.11 suggest.

Table 3.11

Composition of Plantation Class Structure in
Jalpaiguri by Ethnic Identities

Categories	1911		1921	
	Europeans & Anglo-Indians	Indians	Europeans & Anglo-Indians	Indians
Managing, supervising & clerical staff	203	836 6(F)	Manager Assistants Clerical staff	101 204 5 42 300 471
Skilled work	24	3,410 95(F)	-	1,156
Unskilled work	-	64,907 64,560(F)	-	54,473 65,931(F)

Source: Census of India, 1911, Vol. 5, Part 2, 1913, p. 358;
1921, Vol. 5, Part 2, 1923, p. 402.

Note: F indicates females; rest values stands for males.

The other important component of the class structure in the plantation was the working class — namely the plantation labourers. Although the most numerous on the estates, they were economically the weakest and politically the most unorganized and hence at the mercy of the managers. Being under strict surveillance, they could neither launch movements nor could they articulate their demands. For example, the wage structure introduced around 1895, had remained intact until the independence when the basic wage was raised from four annas to six annas per day for a male worker; and from three annas to five annas for the female worker. And a child labour was entitled to only three annas with the enhancement.⁷³ The prices of foodgrains and other essential commodities had gradually risen without either any corresponding improvement in facilities or any wage increase, and yet, there was hardly any organized effort to raise the demands of the workers. This does not mean that there was no discontent among the plantation labourers. In 1918 in fact, there were sporadic and spontaneous outbursts of this discontent in the form of looting of the neighbouring markets following a sudden rise in foodgrain prices which was largely due to the World War I.⁷⁴ Strike was unheard of in the district throughout the British period and it was only after the independence that series of strikes occurred in some of the tea estates. In the year 1953, the number of such strikes had risen to 52.⁷⁵

73. See, Griffith, op. cit., p. 310; also Haldar, op. cit., p. 9.

74. Detailed Report of the General Committee of the Doorga Planters' Association 1918, 1919, p. 211.

75. GOI, Report of the Plantation Enquiry Commission 1956, Part 1 - Tea, 1956, p. 706 (Annexure Liv).

The working class consisted mainly of the immigrant labour - almost all of which had come from places outside Bengal. The bulk of the labour force on the plantation estates was mainly of tribal origin and hailed from such places like Chhotanagpur and Santal Pargana in Bihar and from the Raigarh, Raipur and Nagpur regions of Central Province.⁷⁶ Part of the labour which had earlier come from Nepal, contributed substantially towards this development of plantation economy in the district. Gradually, however the Nepalee proportion had declined as they were unable to provide stable labour force because most of them preferred to return to their native in Nepal after some years. Between 1911 and 1921, the number of Nepalee labourers had decreased by 30 percent.⁷⁷ The plantation managers naturally preferred to recruit workers of similar geo-political and ethnic origin. Like Nepal, Santal Pargana region was also not a prominent source of plantation labour as the migrant labour from that area tended to move to the newly developing mining sites in the Dhanbad-Asansol adjoining areas. Eventually, after 1911 or so, the recruitment of plantation labour was mainly from the Chhotanagpur region and parts of Central Province (see Table 3.12).

Initially, the plantation labourers were mostly tribals - either the Oraons, the Mundas or the Santals, the Kherias, who in 1891, were the most prominent among the five tribal groups in the

76. Gruning, op. cit., p. 33; GOI, op. cit. (1908) p. 34; GOI, op. cit. (1930) pp. 7-8.

77. GOI, op. cit. (1930) pp. 7-8.

Table 3.12

Distribution of the Plantation Labour in Jalpaiguri District
by the Region of Their Origin, 1891-1921

Year	Nepal	Santal Pargana	Chhotanagpur	Central Province
1891	20,578	-	18,808 (only from Lohardaga)	-
1901	18,649	11,000	80,436 (only from Ranchi)	609
1911	34,015	-	99,000 (only from Ranchi)	611
1921	23,681	-	126,214 (only from Ranchi) 1,595 (only from Singbhum) 1,323 (only from Hazaribagh)	8,334 (6,314 from Nagpur; 989 from Bilaspur & 897 from Raipur)

Sources: (i) GOI, The Imperial Gazetteer, Vol. XIV, 1908, p. 34.
(ii) GOI, Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India, Vol. 5, Part 1, 1930, pp. 7-11.

Jalpaiguri district.⁷⁸ Subsequently, recruitment from Chhotanagpur region of Orissa and Central Province resulted in heterogeneous ethnic composition of the class of plantation labourers. In 1921, there were still 23,681 Nepalee labourers who belonged mostly to the lower castes such as - the Tamangs, the Mangars, the Kamis, the Limbus, the Sarkees, the Darjees and so on.⁷⁹ This further added to the ethnic complexity of the plantation labourers in Jalpaiguri. The type of labour force that developed in the Jalpaiguri plantations, was remarkably different from the labour

78. GOB, op. cit. (1891), p. 1-4; also Bhowani Sen et al (ed.), Problems of Adivasi Movement, 1967, p. 15.

79. Gruning, op. cit., p. 41.

force of the non-plantation industry in other parts of Bengal. First, the plantation work was not only agricultural in nature but it also invariably brought to a tea garden labourer a small patch of land of his own to cultivate in order to supplement his income in addition to cash wages. This practice not only ensured the stability of otherwise migrant labour but also gave them a sense of security that was characteristically absent in case of the industrial labour until the progressive legislation in industrial relation came into being. Secondly, barring a few low castes of Nepalees, the plantation work was largely in the hand of the non-Bengalee tribal labour. In contrast, the industrial labour force in Bengal came from the caste Hindus, who too were immigrants from Bihar, Central Province, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh.⁸⁰

By and large, the class structure in the plantation setting emerged with two highly polarized classes namely, the small minority of investors and their managers (officials of the company which managed the estate) on the one hand and the most numerous social category of the plantation labourers on the other. However, the management of the expanding tea estates with their increased capital investment involved complex functions of general administration, record keeping, accounting, marketing and store purchases and so on. These functions were performed by office babus (clerks) hired as employees by the managers. Most of the tea companies had their head offices in Calcutta or elsewhere but they maintained small office staff at the estate site. Furthermore

80. For this, see GOI, op. cit. (1930), pp. 355-360.

the introduction of processing and manufacturing of tea required the services of technical personnel. Thus developed a new class (distinct from the managers and the plantation labourers) comprising of babus (clerks), technicians as well as superior field supervisors in cases where managerial class were not able to cope with supervising activity regularly. This class differed from the labourers both in remuneration and nature of work. They also received better housing, firewood, rationing, and other perquisites. At the same time they had no authority or power that was enjoyed by the managerial class alone.

The middle class was, of course, more numerous than the upper echelon of the plantation society but it was far smaller compared to the category of plantation labourers. Initially the middle class consisted of both the Europeans, Anglo-Indians and Indians. With the passage of time, almost all of them were Indians - mainly the Bengalees who continue to have very stronghold in the plantation estate offices even to this day. The class structure in the plantation setting thus consisted of three distinct and well defined classes which were broadly determined by the relation of social categories to the means of production which also happened to be the basis of the plantation society.

Chapter IV

The Class Structure and Class Relations in the Subsistence Village

Though the social stratification in the countryside is not as remarkable as in the urban setting, to a social scientist even a casual visit to a village would suffice to perceive the existing economic and social differentiations in the countryside. The differences in the number, size and the quality of the dwellings and courtyards are by and large associated with the traditional caste statuses as well as occupational economic and political hierarchies in village India.¹ However in Sanyasikata — our village in the subsistence setting — the physical appearance of a dwelling does reflect the socio-economic status of its resident but not their 'caste' status. The habitations of Sanyasikata which we studied are almost entirely populated with Muslims among whom social hierarchical divisions, unlike in the caste system, are not very pronounced. All the same, some rudimentary form of differentiation does exist even among the Muslims, belonging to the well-recognized divisions such as Syed, Shaikhs, Mughals and Pathans.²

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1. See B.R. Chauhan, A Rajasthan Village, 1967, pp. 19-24; also Yogesh et al, The Changing Frontiers of Caste, 1968, pp. 27-36.
 2. H. Alavi, The Politics of Dependence: A Village in West Punjab, South Asian Review, Vol. 4, No. 2, January 1971, pp. 111-128.

The differences between these categories among Muslims have their origins in ethnic identity. Although notions of hierarchical statuses of these groups may be locally prevalent, the divisions are not caste-like in the sense that the hierarchy is not institutionalized - the Islamic society being fundamentally egalitarian. In Sanyasikata, however, all the households belonged to the Shaikh community. Our study, therefore, provides an ideal setting for the analysis of the agrarian social structure on the 'class' lines. There are only four non-Muslim households of which three are in the Baruagacch habitation - two belonging to the Rajbansi caste, the other is an Oraon - tribal household; the fourth household is in Jumagacch habitation. It is of a high caste Hindu who has a permanent establishment (house) in Jalpaiguri town. He is a primary school teacher in the habitation for the last 5 years where he also maintains his second establishment. Barring these four households all the rest were the Muslim Shaikh households in Sanyasikata.

It is to be noted that even in the Hindu populated habitations of Jalpaiguri district the caste system does not appear to be fully developed. The rural habitations on the whole are predominantly populated with the Rajbansis; even where other castes exist, their number is very small. Hence, naturally the type of social stratification in Jalpaiguri is quite different from the stratification of caste divisions. The nature of rights and obligations with regard to land control and land use thus become

important criteria for determination of rank and placement in the social hierarchy. Invariably, the social categories of 'owners', 'sharecroppers' and 'agricultural labourers' are perceived, identified and their existence acknowledged by the rural inhabitants themselves in Jalpaiguri. Such an identification is an important point of departure in arriving at the sociologically meaningful set of categories as suggested by Beteille.³ The division of agrarian society into more elaborate social categories was in vogue in the pre-independence days but some of these categories have gradually disappeared thereafter due to a variety of land reform legislation.⁴

Out of the total 203 households in the Sanyasikata mouza, we studied 195 households comprising of owners, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers. In terms of their primary occupation or source of livelihood, heads of 87 households of these have identified themselves as owners, 35 as sharecroppers and the remaining 73 as the agricultural labourers. Such data provide us a glimpse of the agrarian social structure. Yet the question is whether we can talk of these categories as 'classes' for the purpose of our analysis.

First of all, not all the households studied fall into anyone of these categories. We classified them on the basis of the major source of livelihood as subjectively perceived by the respondents. With few exceptions, the inhabitants are dependent

3. Beteille, op. cit. (1974a), pp. 7-9.

4. Such social categories consisted of zamindars, jotedars, chukanidars, dar-chukanidars, raiyats, adhiars etc. in case of Bengal.

on more than one source of livelihood although other sources than primary sources too tend to be related with land in a subsistence agrarian economy. Thus the households of owners may not depend exclusively on the cultivation of their own proprietary land for their livelihood and may have also to lease in by entering into sharecropping arrangement or may have to supplement income through earning wages. Similarly, some of the sharecroppers and agricultural labourers may possess proprietary land of their own either in the same or other villages. Such cutting across of one social category by others is quite common in the subsistence setting of the Jalpaiguri district in general; the Sanyasikata habitations included in our study are no exceptions.

Besides cultivation, there are other sources too, some of which are related with the land, such as the bamboo forests, mango groves, fishing in tanks, ponds or temporary water-loggings (that are interspersed all over Sanyasikata) etc. The other subsidiary sources happen to be specialized jobs such as tailoring, carpentry, hair-dressing and so on. However, only 5 households in Sanyasikata were found to be supplementing their family income through them but that too only occasionally. The distribution of households in Sanyasikata with their primary and secondary occupation has been shown in Table 4.1.

There are 47 households which not only possess proprietary rights in land but are also exclusively dependent on it for their livelihood. They constitute 24.11 percent of the total households in Sanyasikata. The percentage of those living exclusively on

Table 4.1

Distribution of Households in Sanyasikata by Their Primary and Secondary Occupations

Primary category	Owner exclusive	Share-cropper exclusive	Agricultural labourer exclusive	Combination with secondary occupations				To
				Owner share-cropper	Owner agricultural labourer	Share-cropper agricultural labourer	Share-cropper trading	
Owner	47 (24.11)	-	-	21 (10.77)	16 (8.20)	-	-	87 (44)
Sharecropper	-	6 (3.08)	-	21 (10.77)	-	6 (3.08)	2 (1.02)	35 (17)
Agricultural labourer	-	-	54 (27.70)	-	11 (5.64)	5 (2.56)	1 (0.51)	73 (37)
Total	47 (24.11)	6 (3.08)	54 (27.70)	42 (21.54)	27 (13.84)	11 (5.64)	2 (1.02)	195 (100)

Notes: (i) Figures in parenthesis inside the table indicate percentages.

(ii) One of the 87 owners is a tenant holding an ijara tenure in which the lease is for longer duration than one year. As he holds superior rights to those of unprotected tenants we have treated him as 'owner'.

(iii) Of the 54 agricultural labourer exclusive, some have land but they have leased to others on adhi or ijara.

wages is as high as 27.70 of the total households. On the other hand, living on sharecropping alone is less common because only 3.08 percent of the total households fall in that category. In all, there are 107 households (see first three columns of Table 4.1) i.e. over 54 percent of the total who occupy well defined single legal status with regard to land. The rest have more than one legal status. Thus, there are 10.77 percent of the households who not only own land but also lease in from others on tenurial or sharecropping arrangement. Some i.e. 8.20 percent in addition to cultivating their own land are engaged in wage labour also. Such mixed social arrangements on land are also seen among the households whose primary occupation is sharecropping. For example there are 10.77 percent of the total households who treat themselves as basically sharecroppers but also cultivate small patches of land of their own; on the other hand those sharecroppers also engaged in wage labour are only 6 households (just 3.08 percent of the total). Similarly some agricultural labourers also possess tiny plot of their own or occasionally enter into sharecropping arrangement but their number is fairly small. Clearly then, the differentiation of the agrarian social structure into 'owners', 'sharecroppers' and 'agricultural labourers' categories are too simplistic and far from precise as Thorner has put it.⁵

Such a classification poses the problem in the identification of agrarian classes and in the understanding of class relations, although the incumbents of one legal status may still be

5. See, Thorner, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

taken as constituting a distinct class in itself. One may still talk of the classes of owners, sharecroppers and the agricultural labourers and by the same token may further add the classes of 'owner-sharecropper', 'owner-agricultural labourer', 'sharecropper-agricultural labourer' and so on. But such groupings will be only little more than mere labels and will fail to reveal the reality of the actual life situation of those lumped together in a legal status category. Similarly those with similar life situations are also likely to be placed in distinct legal categories. In other words those who have the same legal status, may differ in the actual life chances in terms of access to the supply of goods, in external living condition and also in personal life experiences in so far 'these chances are determined by the amount and kind of power or lack of it, to dispose of goods or skills for the sake of income in a given economic order'.⁶

To illustrate the above point let us take the exclusive category of owners. The size of landholding of 47 households (that are exclusively owners) ranges from less than 3 acres to more than 16 acres. To anyone familiar with the agrarian situation in Bengal this range is undoubtedly of considerable significance. Hence to identify all those households as one single agrarian class will be totally misleading because the size of land holding is an important, if not the only, variable which influences one's placement in the agrarian social structure. Similar questions may also be raised with regard to 'sharecroppers', 'agricultural labourers'

6. Gerth & Mills, op. cit., pp. 180-182.

as well as regarding 'owner-sharecroppers' and other permutations and combinations. On the other hand, the class situation of a owner having 3 acres and that of a sharecropper having 6 acres of holding may not be all that different. But, if one goes by legal status alone, they will be placed into two distinct classes. The determination of class on the basis of legal status or statuses in relation to land is thus likely to distort their actual class situations.

More appropriate criterion often used for identifying 'classes' in the analysis of agrarian class structures is 'size of holding'. The whole range of agrarian social categories may be divided into distinct classes of 'rich', 'substantial', 'subsistence' and the 'poor' peasantry on the basis of the size of land holding.⁷

Though the size of holding is a better index of one's class position, the importance of the distinctions in legal statuses cannot be totally undermined as they too affect the objective life situation of the households though only to a certain extent. A sharecropper cultivating 10 acres of land and the owner possessing the same size, can in no way be said to have similar socio-economic conditions; if members of a household have access to more than one legal status then the actual contribution of each of these to the households income and thereby to its placement in the social and economic hierarchy will have to be assessed and accounted; for they

7. Lenin for example has stressed 'size' as an important component of his model of agrarian classes. See, Lenin, op. cit., pp. 82-87.

together determine the objective life situation and hence class position.

Thus 'legal status' and 'size of holding' both taken together would constitute more appropriate and reliable indicators of agrarian classes. The differentiation in the agrarian social structure of Sanyasikata on the basis of size of holding and legal statuses of the households (by primary sources of livelihood) has been presented in Table 4.2.

The data in Table 4.2 clearly reveal that households with similar legal status do not at all form a uniform and homogeneous economic stratum. In all 43 households (over 22 percent of the total) are those of the landless who have no land of their own nor have they any other rights with regard to land. They are the rural proletariat who live purely by selling their labour for wages in the production process. There are in all 61 households (31.28 percent of the total) having landholdings of less than 3 acres each. Similarly, there are 64 households which have land between 4-9 acres. With more than 32 percent of the households, they constitute a substantial category in the Sanyasikata. However, there are only 20 households possessing land between 10 and 16 acres; the remaining 7 households possess landholdings of 17 acres or more.

The average size of the land is slightly better in Jalpaiguri than in many other districts of West Bengal. In fact, as early as 1936-37 when the average family holding for Bengal as a whole was 7.0 acres, it was 9.5 acres of the cultivated land for

Table 4.2

Distribution of Households in Sanyasikata by Their Legal Status
(Primary Occupation) and Extent of Landholding

Legal status	Size of landholding						Total
	No land	3 acres and less	4-6 acres	7-9 acres	10-12 acres	13-16 acres	17 acres or more
Owner	-	25 (12.82)	19 (9.75)	19 (9.75)	10 (5.12)	7 (3.59)	7 (3.59)
Sharecropper	-	7 (3.59)	20 (10.26)	5 (2.57)	2 (1.02)	1 (0.51)	-
Agricultural labourer	43 (22.05)	29 (14.87)	1 (0.51)	-	-	-	-
Total	43 (22.05)	61 (31.28)	40 (20.52)	24 (12.32)	12 (6.14)	8 (4.10)	7 (3.59)
							195 (100.00)

Note: Figures in parenthesis inside the table indicate percentages.

Jalpaiguri district.⁸ The average holding has since then gradually declined. In Sanyasikata the average holding at present is only 3.86 acres of the cultivated land which in fact confirms the general trend. The holding is larger both for the category of owners and sharecroppers - 6.23 acres for the owners and 5.59 acres for the sharecroppers. In contrast the average holding is just 0.22 acres for those agricultural labourers who either own small patches of land or lease in others land for cultivation on sharecropping arrangement. These averages indicate to some extent the pattern of social inequality in Sanyasikata but they do not fully bring out the significant differences between different agrarian strata.

The question as to what constitutes the minimum level of subsistence in Sanyasikata is not easy to resolve. There is neither a generally agreed upon definition of 'minimum subsistence level' nor any standardized method of calculating it. However, some three decades ago, Ambica Ghosh had estimated that for the subsistence of an average family of 5.8 members, the minimum holding required in Bengal was 4.6 acres (or between 4 and 5 acres). The estimate was based on the assumption that the per capita rice consumption was 4 maunds a year (which mean 23.2 maunds per family per year) and per acre yield was 12 maunds.⁹ In the 8 habitations

8. A. Huque, Man Behind the Plough, 1939, pp. 93-123.

9. Ambica Ghosh, 'Agricultural Labour in Bengal', Indian Journal of Economics, Vol. XXVIII, Part III, Jan. 1948, pp. 425-442. Although these are fairly old estimates, they should serve as a guideline in arriving at a 'subsistence holding'.

of Sanyasikata, the average size of the family was 5.4 persons whereas the average yield of rice was 8 maunds per acre. However, since Ghosh's estimates are quite old, one can estimate that the subsistence level today is considerable higher than what it was three decades ago. As such we have taken approximately 7-9 acres as the subsistence holding for an average family of Sanyasikata. Taking this as the base for identifying the subsistence peasant, we can now depict the agrarian social structure and classify the households in Sanyasikata into the following class categories: (i) the rich, (ii) the substantial, (iii) the subsistence, and (iv) the poor peasants besides the landless. The rich peasants are those having a holding of 13 acres or more. Only 15 households (7.69 percent) belong to this class. Of these, except one, all are from the legal category of owners. The remaining one is a sharecropper. The class of 'substantial peasants' consists of those whose holdings range between 10 to 12 acres. There are 12 such households (6.14 percent) of which only two belong to sharecroppers' category and the remaining 10 were all owners. There are 24 households who possess between 7-9 acres (12.32 percent of the total households). They constitute the class of subsistence farmers in Sanyasikata. In this category there are 5 households of sharecroppers. The great bulk of households possess land less than 6 acres which is not sufficient to maintain their households. As many as 101 households (51.80 percent of total households) belong to this class. Of these 40 households (20.52 percent) have a holding between 4-6 acres, and 61 (31.28 percent) have 3 acres

or less. Finally there are 43 households (22.05 percent) that are landless. The class of poor peasants consists of 101 households and it cuts across all the three categories of legal status.

Whereas 44 out of 87 owners (i.e. about 50 percent) households fall in this class of poor peasants, 27 out of 35 sharecroppers (over 77 percent) and 30 (over 42 percent) out of the 73 households of the agricultural labourers also fall into this class (see Table 4.2). Taken together 144 households (101 poor peasants and 43 landless) constitute the poorest strata of the agrarian hierarchy in Sanyasikata.

It is to be noted that the households enjoying superior rights over the land, have invariably larger holdings under their control. In contrast, those with inferior legal status with regard to land tend to possess smaller holdings (see Table 4.2). It is evident in the statistics presented so far that a sizeable number of owners and sharecroppers belong to the class of poor peasants although they have been leasing in land from others and some of them have been supplementing their income by wage labour as well (see Table 4.1).

By and large, social scientists have differentiated the category of owners into distinct strata such as 'land holders', 'supervisory farmers' and 'cultivators' or maliks (landlords) and kisans (cultivators). Mukherjee has treated sharecroppers as a class on the basis of their average per capita income. Others including Sunil Sen also view 'sharecroppers' as a class in itself without going into such details as either the size of holding or

per capita income. Dhanagare has questioned the validity of the notion of sharecroppers as a class.¹⁰ Analysis of the agricultural labourers in class terms has been only inadequately attempted so far in spite of the fact that their class situation has been more homogeneous than other social categories in rural Bengal in recent years. Our data on Sanyasikata show considerable variation among 35 sharecropper households of whom 27 belong to the category of poor peasants as they have holdings of less than 6 acres. There are 5 households with subsistence holdings, 2 having substantial holding and 1 sharecropper's household belonged to the class of rich peasant as he had a holding of more than 13 acres. Similarly, among 73 agricultural labourers households, 43 were landless. Of the remaining 30 households, 29 had holdings of 3 acres or less and only 1 labourer's household had a holding of 4 to 6 acres; which was still below the subsistence level. Hence among agricultural labourers in Sanyasikata variation in socio-economic conditions was less pronounced. The only difference was between those with some land (hence partly poor peasants and partly labourers) and those completely landless.

However, households having similar legal status and same size of their holdings may not have identical life situation objectively speaking. Usually a large land holding corresponds with the size of the family it supports. Therefore, a more appropriate indicator of the actual class situation would be the

10. See Mukherjee, op. cit., pp. 9-10; Thorner, op. cit., pp. 8-9; Sen, *Agrarian Struggle in Bengal 1946-47*, 1972 and Dhanagare, op. cit. (1976).

per capita holding rather than the total holding of a household. The per capita holding in the Jalpaiguri district, though higher than that in other districts of Bengal, has been steadily decreasing. The per capita holding which was 1.9 acres in 1936-37 had gone down to 0.90 acres on the eve of the Independence. Thereafter it has further come down; in 1961 it was 0.62 acres of the net sown area.¹¹

The per capita holding in Sanyasikata is 0.70 acres of the cultivated land. Interestingly enough the per capita holding among sharecroppers was 1.0 acre which was slightly higher than the per capita holding of 0.99 for the owners category. As for the agricultural labourers, the per capita holding is indeed very small i.e. 0.04 acres of the cultivated land. The classification of all the households in Sanyasikata by the per capita holding is given in Table 4.3.

If 7 to 9 acres is the subsistence holding for a family size of 5.4, at least 1.2 acres appears to be the minimum per capita holding necessary for subsistence of a single member household. At any rate, it is safe to say that the households having less than one acre per capita holding are certainly below the subsistence level. In all, 135 households in Sanyasikata fall below that level. Similarly, those possessing between 1.1 to 2.0 acres per capita holding can be taken as constituting the category of subsistence peasant and there are 47 such households in Sanyasikata.

11. See Huque, *op. cit.*, p. 123; also M.R. Chaudhuri, *The Industrial Landscape of West Bengal*, 1971, p. 19.

Table 4.3

Per Capita Holding Among the Households of Three Agrarian Social Categories in Sanyasikata

Categories	No land	0.50 acres and less	0.51- 1.0 acres	1.1- 1.5 acres	1.6- 2.0 acres	2.1- 2.5 acres	2.6- 3.0 acres	3.1- 3.5 acres	3.6- 4.0 acres	4.1- 4.5 acres	4.6- 5.0 acres	Above 5.1 acres	Total
Owners	-	19	23	22	12	2	2	-	2	2	2	1	87
Sharecropper	-	4	16	9	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	35
Agricultural labourers	43	26	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	73
Total	43	49	43	31	16	4	2	-	2	2	2	1	195

In contrast there are only 6 households with per capita holding between 2.1 to 3.0 acres; they belong to the category of 'substantial peasants'. At the top agrarian hierarchy in Sanyasikata are the rich peasants (7 households in all) who have the per capita holding of over 3.1 acres or more.

Interestingly enough the data in Table 4.3 make a remarkable departure from the picture that had emerged from the data in Table 4.2 which attempted delineation of the agrarian class structure in Sanyasikata purely in terms of 'size of landholding' whereby 15 households had formed the topmost agrarian class of rich peasants. In contrast, their number is now reduced to 7 when the per capita landholding is taken as the defining criterion. A similar decline is also evident in the class of substantial peasants whose number comes down from 12 to 6. With the changed criterion of per capita land holding, there is a remarkable increase in the number of households at the subsistence level where as many as 47 households (an addition of 23 households now) qualify to be identified as subsisting peasant households. In contrast, there has been decrease in the number of households in the poorest strata of the agrarian hierarchy although the number (only 9 households) is not very substantial. These data seem to indicate that the households with large holding often correspond with larger size families - a fact which has substantial bearing on the actual life situations and conditions of most of the households in Sanyasikata.

Equally important is the distinction between the total and the operational holdings. A household may have more land under its

control but a part of it may not be either cultivable or may be kept fallow for a variety of reasons. Hence the operational holding may even be smaller. Finally, the nature and the type of soil as held by different households as well as the method of cultivation, quality and quantity of inputs such as machines, implements, seeds, fertilizers and so on or the nature of farming (single crop, double crops etc.) - all of which considerably affect the productivity and therefore determine a household's total income, which in turn determines the actual class situation in which an analyst could place that household.

In the light of the above considerations, the total income derived from a land holding seems to be most appropriate and reliable way of identifying the agrarian classes. This approach encompasses social differentiation and stratification resulting from not only the distinctions in legal status (owners, sharecroppers etc.) but also from varying sizes of family holdings, per capita holding and operative land holdings (unity of production-cultivation) of households as they all will be reflected in the gross incomes. Even the quality and nature of soil as well as the method of cultivation will show up in yields and incomes - which to us then is the most comprehensive of the criteria for determining agrarian class structure. Table 4.4 attempts to classify the 195 households in Sanyasikata into the various distinct classes on the basis of the per capita income derived from land.

If 1.2 acres as per capita holding is taken as the level of minimum subsistence, we assume that approximately 10 maunds are

Table 4.4

Classification of Households by Size of Holding and
Gross Per Capita Income in Sanyasikata (in Rs.)

Land holding	200	201-	301-	401-	501-	601-	701-	801-	901-	1001-	1001 or	Total
	and less	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1000	more	more	
Owners	3 acres and less	4	7	7	1	-	4	1	-	-	-	25
	4-6 acres	-	4	3	6	1	1	2	1	-	-	19
	7-9 acres	-	2	5	3	4	2	-	1	1	1	19
	10-12 acres	-	-	1	2	2	2	-	-	3	3	10
	13-16 acres	-	-	3	3	-	-	-	-	1	1	7
	17 acres or more	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	4	4	7
	Total	4	13	19	15	3	7	4	3	9	9	87
Sharecroppers	3 acres and less	2	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
	4-6 acres	5	5	8	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	20
	7-9 acres	-	3	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
	10-12 acres	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
	13-16 acres	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
	17 acres or more	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	7	10	11	6	-	-	1	-	-	-	35
Agricultural labourers	No land	5	15	12	6	4	-	-	-	1	1	43
	3 acres and less	1	5	13	3	3	1	1	-	1	1	29
	4-6 acres	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
	Total	6	20	26	9	7	1	1	-	2	2	73
	Grand Total	17	43	56	30	10	8	11	6	3	11	195

required per annum for the subsistence of an individual in the household. At a rate of Rs. 50 per maund, Rs. 500 per annum will be the minimum requirement for subsistence per person.* Hence we can classify those households having a per capita income of less than Rs. 500 as belonging to the class of poor peasants. Accordingly, those with per capita income ranging from Rs. 501 to Rs. 700 and from Rs. 701 to Rs. 900 may be said to form the classes of subsistence and substantial peasants respectively. At the top are those households who have a per capita annual income of Rs. 901 or more and therefore they constitute the rich peasants of Sanyasikata.

The data presented in Table 4.4 reveals some interesting features of the agrarian class structure of Sanyasikata. Out of 195 households, 146 (74.5 percent) were below the subsistence level, and hence poor peasants in contrast to 135 households, which belonged to the poor category in terms of per capita holding. Similarly the number of those at the subsistence level has been reduced from 47 to just 18 households. But the number of households of substantial peasants by per capita income, now goes up from 6 to 17 and that of the rich peasant households from 7 to 14. As expected even in respect of per capita income the top strata consists largely of the 'owners' although a few households of agricultural labourers whose per capita income has been quite high (due largely to the smallness of their households) too fall in the top category. There were two such agricultural labourer households (both with single member) in

* This rate has been taken as it was prevalent in Sanyasikata and Siliguri (nearest town) at the time of our field work.

Sanyasikata. Our data indicate that the number of households forming the subsistence peasants in terms of per capita landholding now stands considerably reduced. Most of them are pushed down the scale below subsistence level by the per capita income criterion. This has to be attributed to the fact that most of these peasants who lease in land on sharecropping arrangements have to surrender half a share of their produce to their owners. Their income is thus substantially truncated to the extent that they find themselves below the subsistence level.

The agrarian social structure of Sanyasikata may therefore be divided into four distinct classes. By and large such class situations correspond with the nature of rights held over the land. Thus, sharecroppers and the agricultural labourers in general constitute the poor strata of the agrarian hierarchy though there may be a few exceptional cases. On the other hand, although the owners held superior rights in land, they differed from each other with regard to size of the family holding, size of per capita holding and per capita gross income. Therefore they have been classified into distinct classes on the basis of their legal status on the one hand and per capita income, on the other. The four classes, besides the landless labourers, and their relative strength in the agrarian hierarchy of Sanyasikata are given in Table 4.5.

The delineation of agrarian classes, though quite adequate if attempted on the basis of per capita income, fails to reflect on the nature of class relations as such. Sociology is essentially

about social relations and therefore the nature of relationships prevailing among different agrarian classes is sociologically more meaningful than rigorous quantitative exercises.¹² An analysis of the mode of cultivation, labour utilization and the forms of exploitation forms an essential ingredient of the tradition of agrarian class analysis.¹³ These dimensions should sufficiently reveal the nature of class relations in Sanyasikata. We therefore turn our attention to these relational aspects of the agrarian social structure of Sanyasikata.

Table 4.5

Agrarian Class Structure in Sanyasikata Based on Per Capita Income

Legal status (Primary occupation) categories

Class categories	Owners	Sharecroppers	Agricultural labourers		Total
			Those having access to land	Those without access to land (landless)	
Rich peasants	12	-	1	1	14
Substantial peasants	14	1	2	-	17
Subsistence peasants	10	-	4	4	18
Poor peasants	51	34	23	38	146
Total	87	35	30	43	195

12. Beteille, op. cit. (1974a), p. 2.

13. See Lenin, op.cit.; Mao, op. cit; and Thorner, op.cit.

Three distinct models have been developed by us for understanding the agrarian class structure. The first is that of subsistence farming or of the subsistence peasant whose main aim is to cultivate the land himself or with family labour for his own and for family subsistence. This presupposes that a subsistence peasant has a holding that is just sufficient to maintain himself and his family. The second concerns with the practice of leasing in and leasing out and therefore implies the relationship between the landlord and his tenant or tenants - whether protected or unprotected like sharecroppers. Finally, the third is that of the capitalistic farming in which cultivation is undertaken with a profit motive using hired labour and is oriented toward reinvestment of the profit. In the first phase of our inquiry we found that the heads of the households in the habitations clearly identified themselves either as 'owners', 'sharecroppers' or as 'agricultural labourers'. It is fairly evident that this classification does not reveal the complex reality of class relations in the Sanyasikata nor does it fit into anyone of the three procrustean models viz. - subsistence, landlord-tenant and capitalist.

The sharecroppers who lease in others' land will have qualitatively different relations with other classes as compared to those who live by earning wages. Hence it follows as a corollary that the owners who employ only sharecroppers will have different class interests and class relations as against those who employ only wage labourers. Furthermore, these two cross section of owners will have different interests altogether from

that of the owners who partly employ sharecroppers and partly labourers.

Among the 87 households of 'owners' by primary occupation there are some households that do not at all involve themselves in leasing in or leasing out. There are others who practice leasing in others' land but abstain from leasing out their land to others. Similarly, there are others who lease out their land but do not lease in others land at all. Still others are deeply involved in both the practices of leasing in and leasing out - the details of which are given in Table 4.6.

It is fairly clear from the Table 4.6 that there are at least 33 proprietary households who were in no way involved in the leasing in or leasing out practices. They cultivated their lands themselves either with the help of their family members or occasionally by hiring wage labourers. The extent and mode of such labour utilization by these households besides others will be examined later. The remaining 54 owners households were however, engaged either in leasing in or in leasing out or both. Thus, there were 30 households who leased in land although they had proprietary land of their own. In contrast the number of those leasing out their land after cultivating the land by themselves was 16. There were also five households who engaged both in leasing in and leasing out. Those households engaged exclusively in leasing in or leasing out, number only 3. One of them is dependent on leasing in for the livelihood and the other 2 get their lands cultivated exclusively by leasing out to sharecroppers.

Table 4.6

Nature of Land Utilization: Extent of Leasing in and
Leasing out Among Owners by Size of Holdings

Holding	Proprietary self cultivation	Proprietary and leased in	Proprietary and leased out	Proprietary, leased in and leased out	Only leased in	Only leased out	Total
3 acres and less	15	10	-	-	-	-	25
4-6 acres	6	10	-	2	1	-	19
7-9 acres	9	7	2	1	-	-	19
10-12 acres	2	1	5	1	-	1	10
13-16 acres	-	2	4	1	-	-	7
Above 17 acres	1	-	5	-	-	1	7
Total	33	30	16	5	1	2	87

Of the latter two cases, one is a teacher in a primary school in the Jumagacch habitation where he lives but has also a permanent residence in Jalpaiguri town. The other case is that of a Marwari absentee landlord who possesses 54 acres of land and which are actually registered against three distinct households of the same family. Initially i.e. prior to the Land Acquisition Act of 1953, we gather that this household had much larger jotdari estate - a part of which went over to then East Pakistan after the partition. A part of his remaining estate has subsequently been acquired by the West Bengal government with the result that present estate consists of only 54 acres. People in and around the habitation identified the Marwari estate as the biggest jotedari of this region. The land so held was by and large cultivated by a number of sharecroppers; and even today, all the proprietary holding is cultivated on sharecropping arrangements under the supervision of the landlord's hired clerks known as the Murharis. One of them lives in Jalpaiguri town and the other in Siliguri town, but they frequently visit the habitation to look after the management of the land, supply of seeds, food grains advances, provision of manures, cattles, storing of the produce, advancing loans as well as other day to day business such as maintaining accounts etc. They are paid salary for their services and bargadars of the landlord come in direct contact more often with them than with the Marwari landlord.

By and large, it is more common to cultivate their land themselves particularly among the subsistence households and those

below the subsistence level which are the most preponderent classes in Sanyasikata. Most of them tend to leasing in others land rather than leasing out their land. Thus, of the 25 owner households having a holding of 3 acres and less, 15 are self cultivating, the remaining 10 lease in a part of others lands in addition to cultivating their own lands. Also 9 of the 19 households with 7 to 9 acres of land are self-cultivating and 7 households lease in a part of others land and cultivate it in addition to their own to supplement family income (see Table 4.6).

In contrast, the situation is somewhat different in case of households with larger land holdings. Thus, 6 of the 10 households having landholdings of 10-12 acres normally lease out part of their lands on tenurial or sharecropping contracts. Likewise as many as 10 out of 14 households who hold 13 acres or more also prefer to lease out. Hence two distinct patterns of land utilization seem to be in vogue in Sanyasikata, The tendency of leasing in is more characteristic of small landholders who are below the subsistence level, whereas households with sizeable (substantial) land holdings tend to lease out as a common practice. The reason for the former is that poor peasants tend to add a few more acres to their unit of production in order to make the family subsistence and to add comfort to their life by supplementing family income.

As regards the nature of leasing in-leasing out practices in Sanyasikata, such contracts are entered into both by the lessor and lessee on purely oral understanding with a view to conceal such

an arrangement from the revenue officials. Similarly the extent of this practice is not revealed by the any of households involved in sharecropping arrangements. The most appropriate indicator would be the acreage of land cultivated under sharecropping. Thus, of the 695.7 acres of total land at the disposal of the owners category in Sanyasikata as large as 481.8 acres are under proprietary self-cultivation. The total land leased in by some owners is 60.9 acres, on the other hand the total land leased out by them at the time of our field work was 149.5 acres. Thus, the total acreage under lease in-lease out is 214.15 acres of which 148.25 were leased in by sharecroppers; 60.9 acres by owners and only 5.0 acres by agricultural labourers.

There are two distinct tenurial arrangements in Sanyasi-
kata. The first and ^{the} most dominant is the sharecropping in which the actual cultivator-bargadar surrenders half a share as produce rent to the lessor. The other system, which is as old as the sharecropping but has been waning since the land reform legislation in 1953 is known as ijara in this part of Bengal. In this system the contract is oral and informal as in the first one, but the owner leases out his land for a specified period of time but longer than a year in return for a sum paid by tenant at the beginning of such contract as rent in advance and hence the tenant has some security of his holding. In both the systems, the relationship between the lessor and lessee closely resembles the one between a landlord and his tenant. There are however distinct classes of landlords depending upon whether they lease out to

adhiars on a year to year basis or rent out their land either wholly or partly on ijara tenure. In the latter case, invariably rent is a fixed amount paid usually in cash (occasionally a fixed quantity of produce). Regardless of whether it is adhiari arrangement or the ijara type, the lessors in Sanyasikata are not absentee landlords in the classical sense of the term as most of them also cultivate their lands partly or wholly either with the help of family members or by hiring labourers.

The sharecropping cultivation is quite common in Bengal as a whole and it is now almost institutionalised in Sanyasikata and its neighbouring areas. During all the phases of our field work enquiry, which covered in all 8 habitations of Sanyasikata, we did not come across even a single case of adhiars who had either legally recorded his sharecrop contract or was keen to do so and to assert his tenurial right, although 15 out of the 35 households who identified themselves as sharecroppers (by the primary source of livelihood) had been engaged in the sharecrop cultivation for the past 11 years or more. With the growing scarcity of cultivable land, as elsewhere, Sanyasikata has witnessed a gradual proletarianisation. The number of sharecropper households have for example, declined in Sanyasikata and there has been a steady increase in the number of agricultural labourers' household. This is to be attributed largely to growing evictions of bargadars by landlords within the habitations we studied. The data obtained from the agricultural labourers household clearly confirm this trend. 22 out of the 73 agricultural labourers households were sharecroppers

previously. Of these, 15 were forced to abandon their adhiari land through extra-legal coercion; of the remaining 7, 4 had lost their sharecrop holdings as these had gone under the government vest whereas the remaining 3 had lost theirs due to various other reasons. Coercion is generally exercised by landlords through abstaining from supplying of seeds, cattles, foodgrains, manures etc. on which the adhiar so heavily relies for his cultivation and family maintenance. Some adhiars narrated to us their woes and how their landlords had forcibly resumed cultivation of the land with the help of family servants and how some had even threatened them with life. Resistance against the growing dominance of landlords has been developing in Sanyasikata, but rather slowly. There have been some 4 such instances - one each in the habitations of Bhogrivita, Quarbari, Binabari and the Jumagacch habitations - in the recent past. In two of these the resistance was overcome by enticing each adhiar a sum of Rs. 1000 each. Of the remaining two, one has filed a legal suit (court case) and the other's land has been forcefully resumed by his landlord for 'self-cultivation' which has been a more common phenomenon as regards the landlord-sharecropper relations in Sanyasikata during the past 15 years or so.

In cases, where some sharecroppers have been retained by their landlords, it has been noticed that the size of the sharecropper's holding has been substantially reduced. For example, out of 22 households that have been working as sharecroppers throughout the six years preceding our field work, 11 had retained the same

size of land on sharecrop contract but the size of land in another 10 cases had declined. In only one case, there was some increase in the size of his holding (an addition of only two acres) and that too was on account of his entering into a new contract with another landlord.

However, the decline in the size of a sharecropper's holding must not be interpreted as the decline of the institutionalised system of sharecropping per se. In fact there have emerged new sharecropper households in the last five years. Thus, of the 35 sharecroppers' households studied, sharecropping contract of 13 households were of recent origin. The tendency then is to change sharecroppers every year or every alternate year in any case. The trend in the declining size of the average sharecroppers holding is not of small significance as it reflects on the growing pressure on cultivable land in Sanyasikata. The tendency is to divide a holding into plots which are leased out separately to different adhiars. For example, the primary school teacher of Jumagacch habitation gets his land cultivated through the adhi system. He has divided his proprietary estate of 11 acres into three plots leased to 3 sharecropping households separately. Similarly, the Marwari absentee landlord of Barugacch, who owns 54 acres has distributed the land for sharecropping cultivation among 12 different adhiari households who are directly dependent on him for the major source of their livelihood. This tendency holds good not only for those who lease out all their land but also for those who lease only a part of their land.

In a situation characterised by pressure on land, the plot leased in from one landlord hardly suffices to maintain the sharecropper and his family. Invariably, then the tendency on the part of adhiars is to lease in from more than one landlord at a time in order to make a bare living. Today in Sanyasikata land is not easily available for adhiari cultivation. In fact often adhiars compete for access to additional plots from other landlords. Thus, 24 out of the total of 35 households have been able to get an adhiari contract with only a single landlord. 7 households were able to secure contracts with two landlords each but those who had leased in plots from more than 2 landlords at a time were only 4 households. In all 35 sharecroppers' households had entered into sharecropping contract with 52 holders whether 'owners' or 'labourers' by primary occupation in Sanyasikata.

The sharecropping system entails the participation of both the landlord (lessor) and the tenant (leasee) in the actual production process. The extent of participation not only varies from place to place but also from person to person in Sanyasikata. Thus the extent of relative contribution to inputs by the landlords and the adhiars varies considerably as it will be evident from data presented in Table 4.7. What determines the relative contribution is more the type of personal relationship rather than any statutory arrangement or obligation.

As per the data, the landlords contribution to the production process is rather insignificant. His major contribution comes in the supply of seeds and, to some extent, of manures.

Table 4.7

Extent of Sharecroppers' Contribution to
Inputs in the Production Process

Items	Wholly	Partly	Nil	Total
Seeds	1	-	34	35
Cattles	24	6	5	35
Manures	16	13	6	35
Plough and implements	32	-	3	35

The sharecroppers on the other hand supply cattles, ploughs and implements and partly manures in addition to his own and his family's labour. Yet in all the 35 cases the sharecroppers have to surrender half a share of their produce after adjustments with regard to the amount of the seed provided by the landlord have been made. There have been some cases where the sharecropper's contribution has been almost negligible but such cases were very rare. Hence, there is a remarkable departure from the status, rights and obligations of adhiars as stipulated by law in Bengal and the actual situation of adhiars as existing in Sanyasikata today.

The sharecropping arrangements and family kinship bonds together form a nexus of relationship. Cases of father leasing out to son, brother to another brother or cousin brother, uncle to nephew and so on were frequently reported in the course of our inquiry. In fact the above-mentioned 'few' cases of sharecroppers

who did not contribute the cattle, plough or seeds refer to such familial kindreds of landlords. Out of the 52 landlord-adhiar contract from whom the 35 households of sharecroppers in Sanyasikata had leased in land on crop-sharing basis, 13 were those between close relations (father, brother or uncle) and 20 others were between those who were distantly related. Only in 19 cases no such kinship ties existed between landlords and their adhiars.

Invariably, therefore the landlords and the adhiars belong to the same primordial group either by ethnic or clan identity. Thus 40 out of the 52 landlord-adhiari contract, the lessor and lessee belonged the same ethnic group, of the remaining 12 contracts, 8 were those between Marwaris and Muslims and 4 between Bengali caste Hindus and Muslims.

Why the sharecrop cultivation system in Sanyasikata is built primarily around kinship network is an interesting question. One of the explanations seems to lie in the fact that with the establishment of separate households due to fission of the family, the close kins (families of orientation) feel obliged to sustain the families of procreation, though they do not like to surrender the land at the others disposal.¹⁴ To what extent the close connection between kinship bonds and social arrangement on land is related with the practice of polygamy among Muslim inhabitants of Sanyasikata is an equally interesting question but requires to be more closely examined which is possible only if a fresh enquiry is launched. In all probability, the other reason is that the

14. The phrase has been taken from K. Davis, Human Society, 1966, p. 399.

lessor-households attempt to escape the imposition of procurement levy by reducing the unit of agricultural production. Sharecropping arrangement with their close kins is an easy way out. It also ensures that the informal arrangement is kept strictly outside the perview of the law.

The sharecropping arrangement is, of course, not confined to the category of 35 sharecropper households only. Some of the owners and labourers household too engage in sharecrop cultivation. But the total land leased in by them is small. For example, 31 owners leased in 44.5 acres of land under sharecrop arrangement. On the other hand the 5 agricultural labourers household were able to lease in only 5 acres for sharecrop cultivation. Therefore, in all 197.65 acres of land were under adhiari cultivation.* The adhiari contracts in these cases were also oral; all of them paid half a share of the produce as rent. The extent of contribution of 31 owner-sharecroppers to the production processes has been given in the Table 4.8.

The Table 4.8 shows that 28 households of the owner-sharecroppers did not contribute seeds. The remaining 3 households however contributed the seeds wholly by themselves. In all the three cases, the lessor and lessee were closely associated with kinship bond. As for the cattles, 27 households provided their own cattles but the other 4 households contributed one each of the pair that was required for cultivation. Similar pattern was also found in case of supply of manures. Of the 31 households, 25

* This figure is for the land on sharecrop-cultivation and not for the land in ijara. Hence it does not tally with the figure on page 139.

Table 4.8

Extent of Owner-Sharecroppers' Contribution to
Inputs in the Production Process

Items contributed	Wholly	Partly	Nil	Total
Seeds	3	-	28	31
Cattles	27	4	-	31
Manures	25	5	1	31
Plough and implements	31	-	-	31

Note: Some of the owner-sharecroppers did not disclose the adhiari land in the beginning but later when asking about sharecropping arrangement they accepted. Hence their number has increased in this table.

households provided the manures wholly and 5 partly; in only one case the household did not provide any manure. The implements were however provided in all the 31 cases by the lessees themselves. The extent of contribution of these owners households in case of share-crop cultivation is in no way different from contribution made by actual sharecroppers (primary source of occupation).

Given such variation of sharecropping arrangement it is rather incorrect to speak of sharecroppers as a class. In fact it is to be noted that even those who live primarily on sharecropping have agricultural land of their own. Thus, out of the 35 share-cropping households 24 had also some land of their own* (in all

* The figure does not tally with the figure given in Table 4.1. The reason is that some sharecroppers did not initially disclose that they have proprietary landholding of their own but they disclosed it in course of our probing. The land so held was however very small.

46.8 acres). Most of them had tiny plots of land but 4 of them had proprietary landholding ranging between 3 to 5 acres each. Clearly then, the sharecropping households too do not have identical class situation either in actual land control or in relational terms.

In addition to adhiari sharecropping, another leasing in and leasing out practice emerging today is known as 'ijara' in Sanyasikata. In this tenurial arrangement, which is again without any legal recording, the owner leases out his land for a specified period of time ranging between 1 to 4 years depending upon the size of plot as well as the amounts advanced by tenants to landowners. The tenant makes a lump-sum payment at the time of entering into contract with landowners. Such leasing out is more prevalent among those who have small land holdings. In fact those inhabitants who have recently got vest land prefer to lease out on ijara. About 16.40 acres were on such leases by owner households. Of these 6 acres had come from the category of owners' households; the rest came from the agricultural labourers who had secured vest land recently. Thus of 30 households of agricultural labourers having some land holding, 7 had leased out on ijara involving 10.40 acres out of the total of 42 acres at their disposal. The land so leased out is taken up for cultivation not by those who have large holding but by those who have either small or medium size land-holdings with a view to enhance their units of production and supplement their family income.

Besides the system of sharecrop cultivation the other prevalent mode in Sanyasikata is cultivation through hired labour.

Those who sell their labour and work in the farms owned by others receive wages in return. There were 73 such households of agricultural labourers in the 8 habitations of Sanyasikata. The number of households however does not indicate the extent to which wage labour is utilized in Sanyasikata. The Table 4.9 presents the detailed data about the number of working male and female members and the nature of employment of the 73 households investigated in Sanyasikata.

Table 4.9

Distribution of Working Members by the Number, Sex and Nature of Employment in the Households of Agricultural Labourers in Sanyasikata

Working members in the households	No. of house-holds	Male	Female	Total	Those employed/hired on daily basis	Those employed/hired on yearly basis	Total agriculture labourers
1	36	36	-	36	35	1	36
2	24	41	7	48	40	8	48
3	9	21	6	27	20	7	27
4	4	13	3	16	8	8	16
Total	73	111	16	127	103	24	127

Two types of agricultural labourers must be distinguished on the basis of the nature of contract they enter into with the employer. One consists of those labourers who are employed on yearly contract in contrast to those who are hired and who work on daily wage basis. The first type is not very common in Sanyasikata. In fact, if we go by the nature of contract of the head of households, there are only 5 such households hired on yearly basis in Sanyasikata but the number of those heads employed on daily wage basis is 68. The reasons as to why the annual basis is not common are not far to seek. The grown up and married ones are not preferred by the employers on annual contracts. The labourer too dislikes such a contract as it entails heavy demands on him/her with the result that he or she ^{not} may/be able to attend to the family necessities adequately because such a contract virtually attaches or binds the yearly hired labourer to the landowner.

Naturally, only those households with two or three working members tend to allow one or two of their members to enter into yearly contracts. Thus, of the 36 households having one working member each, there was only one yearly employed labourer in Sanyasikata. In contrast, those with two or more working members had as many as 23 of the 24 yearly employed labourers. The reason is they have young and non-married working members who are generally preferred for yearly employment. The yearly employed labourer has to be always at the back and call of his master (employer). He is made to work from early morning to late at night and often has to spend nights at the employers residence so that his services

could be availed of any time if the need arises. In return for his services, the yearly employed is paid a specified amount as wages (generally in instalments of cash and kind combined); in addition meals and clothes too are provided by the employer. The sum varies from person to person and is mainly determined by the labourer's age, ability and capacity for work. In spite of these benefits the actual wages received by the yearly employed labourers are very meagre. On an average the daily rate of wages received by the yearly employed agricultural labourer comes to Rs. 3.0 per day whereas the rate of daily wagers prevalent in Sanyasikata was slightly higher than this.

Interestingly, the labourers who reside in the same habitation are not generally preferred for an yearly contract as the employing landlords feel that they may not be able to extract work adequately if the yearly basis labourer happens to be from the same habitation. The yearly employed labourers are therefore usually from outside the landlord's habitation although there are a few exceptions to this rule. For example, in Binaguri habitation, of the 12 yearly employed wage labourers, 9 were from outside and only 3 were from Binaguri itself. Hence, extra work which the yearly employed labourer has to perform is not generally either demanded or done by agricultural labourers employed on the daily wage basis. The only advantage in the annual contract over the daily-wage system is that it ensures the labourer work all the year round so that he does not have to remain without subsistence even for single day - a risk which a daily wager is sometimes exposed

to, particularly during the lean months of the agricultural work cycle.

The bulk of the agricultural labourers in Sanyasikata consists of daily wage earners. For instance of the 127 agricultural labourers employed in Sanyasikata as large as 103 were daily wage earners (see Table 4.9). They are required to work for specified hours in a day as per the contract. Of course, there is no standardized hours of work but the local custom is that a labourer works from about 7 o'clock in the morning to the sun set for his/her employer. On an average it comes to 9 hours of work every day for a daily wage earner.

Besides the annual and daily wage basis, there is yet another system of work organization on contract basis, not shown in Table 4.9. Very often, it so happens that the daily wagers engage themselves in piece work rather than working for the whole day on a fixed wage. In such cases a labourer either takes some of his family members to speed up the completion of the contract work or organize a few other workers in the fulfilment of such contract and share with them a part of the contract-sum received from the employer who takes the contract. The amount is distributed by the main organizer to his partners according to the rate fixed by him. This type of agricultural work is known as 'Mulai' in Sanyasikata and its neighbouring areas.

The wages as received in the Mulai contract or piece work system turns out to be higher in the case of daily wage labourers. The average rate on an hourly basis comes to about Rs. 3.50 per day.

The wages are paid by employers partly in cash and partly in kind though the payment made in kind is more substantial. The labourer is generally paid one kilogram of rice; he is also served with tea and muri twice during the day by his landlord who also offers the labourer four pieces of biris a day while he is working in the field. In addition to these he is paid a sum of Rs. 1, 1.50 or 2 depending on the availability of labourers at various seasonal or peak-work periods. Generally, the cash rate is higher at the peak of agricultural operations when the labourer is in a better bargaining position. But more often labourers are weak in their bargaining position because of the advances they take from their landlords during the lean season. Consequently they have to perform certain important seasonal work and still accept a wage rate lower than the normal. In the lean seasons, however, daily wagers have a weak bargaining position, which is evident in the fact that although some landowners are unusually tardy in paying wages, the labourers face the hardships in the absence of any alternatives. At least, we noticed this during the brief period of our field work stay in Sanyasikata. Paradoxically payment of wages was found in arrears in case of rich (large-size) landowners; the substantial, and medium size land owners, according to the labourers employed by them, treat them much better than the rich owners do.

Despite the low rate of wages and a great deal of hardships resulting therefrom, female work participation among the labourers households in Sanyasikata, is quite rare. There were

only 16 females among the 127 agricultural labourers in Sanyasikata. However they did not engage themselves in the actual field work. In fact 13 out of 16 female labourers worked as maid servants in the households of rich and substantial landowners and only 3 were engaged in the regular farm work per se. Whenever any of their family members takes up a piece work (Mulai) contract, female members do assist in early completion of the work. But in general the women work participation as farm workers is very insignificant. The reason is that women folk working in the farm is considered as entailing a loss of social status of their families. Consequently even a small landholding households have to engage in hired labour whenever pressing needs arise. However the extent to which the use of hired labour is made in Sanyasikata varies as the Table 4.10 indicates.

Table 4.10

Nature of Labour Utilization by Owners of Varying Landholding Size

Landholding	Only one's own	Family's	One's own/ family's and hired labour	Only hired labour	Total
3 acres and less	10	8	7	-	25
4-6 acres	-	1	18	-	19
7-9 acres	-	2	17	-	19
10-12 acres	-	-	7	2	9
13-16 acres	-	-	6	1	7
17 acres or more	-	-	2	4	6
Total	10	11	57	7	85

Note: Two of the owners belonging to landholding group of 10-12 acres and 17 acres or more, get the land cultivated through share-cropping arrangement.

As data in Table 4.10 suggest, only 21 owners, households cultivate the land with their own or family's labour. In all, 64 households contact hired labour for the purpose of actual cultivation. Of these, 57 households contributed their own or family labour force as well. In contrast there were 7 households who relied exclusively on hired labour for the purpose of actual cultivation. This figure, however, simplifies the reality, for it is to be noted that most of the households who responded that they contracted yearly employed labourers, were those where landholders acted merely as supervisors. They were not found doing actual manual work on the farms though they reported to have contributed their own or family's labour force during the phase of interviewing. Such practice became clear only at the later phase of our stay in Sanyasikata. There were 30 households out of the entire sample of 87 owners who employed labourers on yearly contractual basis. The number of labourers employed on yearly basis, varied from one household to the another and whereas 11 households employed 2 such labourers each, the remaining 19 contracted only one labourer each. Their yearly remuneration ranged from Rs. 50 to Rs. 400 in addition to their daily meals and clothes. Thus, of the 41 yearly employed labourers,* 7 received a wage rate of Rs. 100 and less; 15 between Rs. 101 to 200; 18 between Rs. 201 to 300 and only 1 labourer received a sum of Rs. 400 as his wages per annum. They performed the everyday agricultural activities of the farm though daily

* This figure of yearly employed labours does not tally with the figure given in Table 4.9. Their number here is more as most of them came from habitations that were not studied by us.

labourers were also utilized whenever occasion arose and mainly at the peak of the agricultural season.

It is from this category of landholders, one may anticipate, that new mode and relations of production might emerge in Sanyasikata what is basically a subsistence village. To what extent such mode and relations of production approximates the capitalistic mode of production will be examined only in the Chapter VI. However some of the owner households also contribute substantially their own or family labour force in addition to frequently or occasionally employing daily wage labourers. This suggests that the subsistence economy dominates Sanyasikata. Although there is some hiring of labour in the production process, its impact on the quality of class relations at this stage is quite insignificant.

In recent times, there has been a rapid growth in the number of agricultural labour households in Sanyasikata. This trend has to be attributed to the fact that the passing of the West Bengal Bargadar's Act in 1955 has led to increased resumption of adhiari lands by the landlords for their personal cultivation. This process has reduced their erstwhile adhiars to the status of wage earners. Secondly lands of several big landholders known as jotedars, have gone under the government vest; with the result that those working on these land have ceased to be adhiars as they have begun to work as owner cultivator on the land so occupied or have been forcefully being cultivated by the former jotedar themselves. Whereas the former has been the case with the vest

land of Baruagacch, latter was the phenomena in Binaguri habitations. Equally important is the increasing trend in the land alienation i.e. sale of proprietary land due to indebtedness. The latter has also been responsible in reducing the size of the holding and thereby compelling many households to fall back on wage-labour as their primary source of livelihood, and in some cases on sharecropping as a supplementary source of income. In fact, the holdings of agricultural labourers are so small that they prefer not to cultivate them themselves. Out of the 30 labourer households having holdings - whether proprietary, vest or barga (adhiari), only 12 were self-cultivating; 7 had given their plots on adhiari contract; 7 on ijara and of the remaining 4 households, 3 had given part of the land on ijara and part on adhi whereas 1 had mortgaged his land with a moneylender.

The relation between the agrarian classes is not confined to the production-process only in Sanyasikata. They get further related with one another by means of credit mechanism. They also develop a nexus of linkages with government agency, towns and markets through the purchase and sale of agricultural, and other essential goods but more importantly through the existing credit mechanism in Sanyasikata. The Table 4.11 hence presents the data to show the extent to which the people in Sanyasikata are related with one another, to the government agency and to the town-market centred economy by means of credit network.

Table 4.11

Extent of Indebtedness and Sources of Rural Credit
Among Different Social Categories in Sanyasikata

Cate- gories	Owners						Sharecroppers						Agricultural labourers						Grand total
	Extent of indebtedness (in Rs.)						Extent of indebtedness (in Rs.)						Extent of indebtedness (in Rs.)						
	Loans obtained from			TNH	NHI	Loans obtained from			TNH	NHI	Loans obtained from			TNH	NHI	Loans obtained from			
	IGA	INF	ITM			Total	IGA	INF			ITM	Total	IGA			INF	ITM	Total	
Land- less 3 acres and less	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	43	27	1600	3750	350	5700	5700
4-6 acres	25	24	6275	5150	1700	13125	7	7	1500	2400	100	4000	29	19	1750	3150	1700	6600	23725
7-9 acres	19	19	10900	3350	3550	17800	20	20	4900	3700	3100	11700	1	1	300	-	-	300	29800
10-12 acres	19	16	18600	7000	5200	30800	5	5	2300	700	-	3000	-	-	-	-	-	-	33800
13-16 acres	10	10	6900	400	5850	13150	2	2	700	700	-	1400	-	-	-	-	-	-	14550
Above 17 acres	7	6	2550	1150	2400	6100	1	1	-	500	-	500	-	-	-	-	-	-	6600
	7	1	1000	1500	1500	4000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4000

Note: TNH - Total number of households; NHI - Number of households indebted; IGA - Indebted to government agencies; INF - Indebted to native farmers; ITM - Indebted to town merchants etc..

The Table 4.11 shows that households in Sanyasikata by and large require credit for which they have access to three important and independent sources: the government agency; the native well-to-do farmers and town merchants, traders and professional moneylenders. Out of the 87 owner households, as many as 76 were indebted. Of the 11 households that were free from indebtedness, 7 were from the category of those having land holdings of 13 acres or more; 3 households had holding between 7-9 acres and only 1 household with less than 3 acres had managed to remain free from indebtedness. Similar situation also exists among the agricultural labourer households. For example, of the 73 labourer households, 47 were indebted (of which 27 had no land holding as against 20 who had some land holding). The 35 sharecropping households, on the other hand, were all indebted, 16 being indebted to their own landlords. In case of sharecroppers, landlord is the major source of credit. Advancing loans to one's own sharecropper yields tactical as well as material advantage to the landlord. At the harvest when the crop-yield is divided into shares between the landlord and his sharecropper, the former usually slices away a part of the adhiar's share in partial or full adjustment of the amounts loaned to his sharecropper without forgetting to add the interest accrued on the principal sum. The extent of usury that goes on in these transactions in Sanyasikata can hardly be measured in quantitative terms but has to be gauged only in qualitative terms.

Interestingly enough, average amount of loan taken by the category of 76 indebted 'owners' was Rs. 1,117 (each) which was

nearly twice the average debt (Rs. 538) of the sharecropper in Sanyasikata. To highlight the debt burden on different social categories we may summaries Table 4.11 as follows:

<u>Category</u>	<u>Total households indebted</u>	<u>Average debt per indebted household</u>
Owner	76	Rs. 1,117
Sharecropper	35	558
Agricultural labourer with land	20	345
Landless labourers	27	211

Paradoxically though it may sound, the lowest strata of the agrarian hierarchy in Sanyasikata was relatively more free from debt and the highest debt burden was on the category of owners- particularly the 'subsistence' and 'substantial' land holders. This convincingly demonstrates that 'land control' does not necessarily mean independence*, though credit and market linkages their so-called independence is neutralised even in a subsistence oriented economy. The landless were much better off in this regard. In fact, our data suggest that the landless labourer is less likely to be indebted as compared to the labourers with land holdings who are more prone or exposed to risk of being indebted. For example, 20 out of 30 labourer households having small holding were indebted with an average debt of Rs. 345 (each); whereas only 27 out of 43 landless labourers were indebted and owed an average debt of Rs. 211 (each).

* Which is often claimed in respect of the 'middle peasant' category by the classical as well as 'contemporary thinkers.

The credit in Sanyasikata is obtained equally from the government agency and the private sources, the former being confined to the cooperative bank. In only two cases we came across a household having an access to a 'land mortgaged bank' and in another case, the household had obtained an agricultural loan from the block development office. In all 50.1 percent of the total credit was obtained from the government bodies. The remaining 49.9 percent of the total credit was supplied by the private sources - either the rich landowners or professional moneylenders who are the most important credit sources especially for sharecroppers and agricultural labourers. For example, whereas owner households could manage 54.4 percent of credit facilities from the government agency, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers could procure only 45.6 and 28.9 percent of their credits respectively (see Table 4.11).

Thus, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers have to fall back upon the private agencies for the loan. The sharecroppers in Sanyasikata obtained 54.4 percent from private sources as against 71.1 percent by the agricultural labourers. In contrast, owner households' loan extracted from private sources were low with compared to that of government agency viz. 45.6 percent from the non government bodies. It also shows that substantial land holders have easy access to the cooperative bank as they have enough land to register against the credit obtained therefrom or even to mortgage if necessary. Thus, the credit from cooperatives has been practically monopolised by those having holdings between 4 and 9 acres and also to some extent by those with 10-12 acres holdings,

particularly from among the owner households. Similarly those sharecroppers households having 7 to 9 acres holdings too had a better access to the cooperative agency than other sharecroppers. All the rest of owners, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers household have to look to private agencies, whether local rich landlords or moneylenders from towns. The credit needs to a large extent and marketing to some extent thus link Sanyasikata with the outside world. In fact linkage through and for credit is the next important only to the contacts of inhabitants of Sanyasikata with revenue and levy collecting offices and officials. The linkages through the political institutions and mechanisms of gram-sabha and panchayat with the outside world were of course there, but not of any major consequence for Sanyasikata, nor very effective in introducing change in the subsistence oriented economy and society.

The credit also links them with towns and markets. Thus 23.8 percent of the credit obtained by owners, were provided by town merchants, traders and moneylenders. Most of these households sell their of agricultural produce - mainly the commercial crop such as jute - in the village markets which are regularly visited by the Marwari merchants from the Siliguri town, who not only buy their product but also supply them credit as and when needed. Since both need each other a symbiosis is formed. Some sharecroppers and agricultural labourers too manage to fulfil a part of their credit needs through the town dwellers but the credit obtained by them from these sources constitute only 15.6 and 16.3 percent of their credit respectively in Sanyasikata.

However, more important sources of loans are the villagers themselves though none of the respondents disclosed that they took recourse to such practices. Thus, 28.4 percent out of the 49.9 percent of loans obtained from private agencies, was contributed by the local well-to-do landowners. Whereas they supplied a little over 21 percent of the credit to the owners, to the sharecroppers and agricultural labourers they have supplied 38.8 percent and 34.8 percent (respectively) of their credit needs (see Table 4.11).

The local rich owner-cum moneylenders generally provide credit in kind i.e. by supplying paddy which is the only other product besides jute in Sanyasikata. The interest too is generally charged in kind. Cooperative bank and town moneylenders on the other hand give loan in cash though the cooperative bank meets 10 percent of the credit demands in the form of commodity supply such as fertilizer. Though the cooperative bank charges 15 percent interest, the local landlords and townish moneylenders charged heavy interest rates between 50-100 percent of the principal per annum, with few exceptions. Naturally, inhabitants of Sanyasikata fail to pay back the loan with the result that they are gradually losing control over the land which has been passing into the hands of outside moneylenders or local landed magnets.*

* This was often reported to us in course of our field work. To substantiate this point however a thorough examination of land transfers and land alienation over the last 10 to 15 years in Sanyasikata would be needed which we could not attempt in the present enquiry. Hence this observation may be taken as only tentative.

Chapter V

The Class Structure and Class Relations in the Plantation Village

There are 155 plantation estates in Jalpaiguri district and all of them, without exception, are engaged in the cultivation of tea.¹ Every tea estate generally has a manufacturing unit where the raw tea leaves are processed and manufactured into beverage for the consumer. Therefore, the available reports and literature on plantation have tended to treat plantation more as an industry*. The estate managements too identify with pride their units as 'industries' and this tendency is a part of the wider change in the realm of economic production in favour of modern industrial establishments. Hence, studies on plantations in India have either ignored or undermined the fact that a plantation also involves use of large tracts of land for cultivation and that bulk of the plantation population draws its livelihood from land. Thus, the plantation as an agrarian setting has been neglected by social scientists in India.

The Meenglas Tea Estate and its habitations were the location of our field work in the plantation setting. The estate has an area of 2670.54 acres of land and out of its 1410 daily rated but permanently employed wage labourers, 1358 earn their livelihood from working in the tea farms. The remaining 52

1. The figure has been arrived at from, All India Tea Directory, 1960.

* This point has already been referred to in the Chapter I, see p. 27.

labourers work in the factory of the estate.² The network of social relationships revolving around land and tea production thus becomes an important area of enquiry. Our aim is to understand the plantation social structure in general and nature of class and class relations in particular. At the same time, the study of plantation social structure only in terms of land control and utilization would be a gross over-simplification of the complex reality because the manufacturing unit is an integral part of plantation social setting. We have taken into account the mutual interaction between the two although our focus is mainly on studying the social arrangements on land as they exist today in the plantation estates of Jalpaiguri district. We selected the Meenglas Tea Estate for the purpose of our enquiry.

Our detailed field work survey covered a sample of 85 households from four habitations of Meenglas. The habitations and households studied were those of the plantation labourers who happen to be only one of the three major social categories identifiable in any plantation estate. But they constitute the most numerous class in the social structure of plantation. The remaining two are the managerial supervisory class and the clerical staff who have remained outside the purview of our enquiry for the following two reasons: firstly, the residential bungalows of the estate's managerial staff are not situated in a locality or habitation but are scattered over the estate. In contrast, the settlement of the babus - the clerical staff - is confined to the

2. The Meenglas Tea Estate Records: File - Garden Labour Position.

factory line premises of the estate. Neither of these is a numerous class as such and we did not take up the detailed investigation of the managerial and the clerical staff households through interviewing. Their role in the social structures of the plantation has of course been studied but only in relation to and as perceived by the plantation labourers of the estate. However, we considered it necessary to substantiate and corroborate the data thus collected with a careful use of the field work observation, informal discussions as well as by consulting the tea estate's official records as were made available to us.

The three distinct social categories, as sketched above, form the major components of any plantation social structure in Jalpaiguri district in general. In a way, they seem to be indirectly contingent on the mode and relations of production though they do not fit exclusively into Marxian dichotomous frame of 'those who own the means of production and those who don't'. In fact, all the three classes are essentially non-owners in the plantation context as none of them own the means of production in strict sense. Nevertheless, they all differ from one another not only in the nature of work performed but also in remuneration, social status and power in the plantation hierarchy. The managerial class in Meenglas as elsewhere, represents basically the interests of the owner-shareholders and other capital investors who employ them for the management of the tea estates, looking after its day to day administration and so on. In this sense, the managerial households constitute some sort of a middle class. Naturally, their

interests lie primarily in strengthening their own position within the estate. Likewise, the clerical staff - i.e. the babus employed to perform the routine work in the estate's office constitute a lower middle class, subordinate to the managerial category in terms of remuneration and status but basically sharing the same orientation and outlook to the property structure and relations within the estate. How the objective life situation, class identity and overall orientation of plantation labourers (the third and most important component) differ qualitatively from the other two components will become clear later in this chapter.

The Meenglas estate, associated with a business firm in the United Kingdom is being presently looked after by an agency of the Duncan Brothers and Co. in India.³ It is important to note that the Duncan Brothers as agents managed the business of as many as 13 different firm in 1952.⁴ Naturally, the number of tea gardens under their control was higher than that of number of firms because a firm for whom the Duncan Brothers acted as agents possessed more than one tea estates in Jalpaiguri. In 1952, for instance 55 different business firms controlled as many as 114 tea gardens in Jalpaiguri district alone.⁵ Some of these firms had estates in other districts too but we were not concerned with them.

The actual owners and controllers of the estate resemble the absentee landlords. However, unlike the parasitic absentee

3. See, The Meenglas Tea Estates Records: File - Budget Season (of any year).

4. Detailed report of the General Committee of Dooars Branch of Indian Tea Association (hereafter DBITA), 1951, Appendix F.

5. Ibid.

landlords, they participate in the production process by providing and investing capital in the estate. The management is, however, looked after by the agency of Duncan Brothers which has recruited the managerial staff for the day to day administration of the estate. They are responsible for purchases of tools, machines and other equipments for the farm as well as for the factory; and other requirements for the tea cultivation; manufacturing and transportation of tea from the actual plantation estate; for marketing and export; disbursement of wages to labourers; selling and trading of the manufactured tea and cost-accounting; and maintaining liason with the governmental administration.

The managerial staff, hence occupies the highest position in the social hierarchy of Meenglas estate. It consists of only four persons, the general manager and his three assistants for the whole of the estate. The manager is known as 'Bara Saheb' among the plantation labourers. Of the three assistants, called 'chhota sahebs' of the estate; two look after the tea farms and the third happens to be an engineer who is incharge of the processing and manufacturing unit of the Meenglas Tea Estate. For their services in the estate, the managerial staff is paid monthly salaries; in addition they also receive various other handsome benefits and perquisites from the headquarters in Calcutta as well as the local comforts in the plantation estate. In Meenglas their benefits range from the provision of free and furnished bungalow to free domestic services of watchman, gardener, sweeper, bearer and other servants. It is from these that extra services are frequently

taken by the managerial families without paying them any additional remuneration.

The managerial staff is hired on contractual tenures and therefore their appointments are normally tenable for a specified period of time; after that their services may be extended, terminated or transferred to other estate in the district or outside, but controlled by the same agency on revised terms of a fresh contract. Hence the composition of this class keeps varying from time to time. Until the early 1960's or so almost all such positions were held by the British as the firm which owned the Meenglas estate was registered in Great Britain. Today, the managerial staff is, however, exclusively comprised of Indians; two of them are Bengalees while two others have come from outside Bengal.

In spite of their mobile composition, the managerial households constitute the topmost class in the agrarian social structure of Meenglas. In pursuit of the owners' interests, the managers try to raise profits by exploiting the actual labour force at their disposal by extracting the maximum work and by keeping the wage level down as much as possible. Hence it is against them that the plantation labourers feel a direct clash of their class interests.

Below the managerial staff are the babus who too constitute only a small part of the total work organization in the Meenglas estate. This is largely due to the fact that a substantial part of the office work is carried out at the agency house i.e. the company's head quarters in Calcutta. The local clerical

staff therefore is engaged in some routine paper keeping, stock-book checking, maintaining account of the total tea plucked and tea manufactured, preparing weekly statements of wages and rationing, maintaining files of provident fund and similar benefits given to plantation labourers and other minor supervisory activities of undefined nature either connected with tea farm or manufacturing unit. Nevertheless, the clerical staff functions as subordinate to the managerial class but it is treated as superior to the class of labourers. There are only 12 such personnel in the estate; 2 store-keepers, 3 engaged in the manufacturing unit and the remaining 7 in the gardening division of the estate. Like the babus, the medical and technical service staff too are included in this category of the social structure in the plantation estate. There are 7 such employees of the Meenglas estate - 3 belong to the medical staff comprising of a medical officer, compounder and a nurse, and the technical service staff of four - consisting of carpenter, electrician, vehicle mechanic and factory fitter (one each) for the whole estate. Thus, in all 19 personnel constitute the clerical staff (lower middle class) of the estate. Though they vary with one another in terms of status enjoyed, like the manager and his assistants, they all are paid salaries and are placed in three distinct grades (pay-scales) prevalent in most of the tea estates that are associated with the Dooars Branch of the Indian Tea Association.⁶

6. See for grades, Detailed Report of the General Committee of DBITA, 1971, pp. 81-82.

The differences in the emoluments paid in the three **grades** are not very substantial except perhaps between the remuneration of the medical officer and that of a technician at the lowest grade. Thus the top man in the medical staff is entitled to an initial monthly basic salary of Rs. 287, which is Rs. 257 and 247 respectively for the corresponding strata in the clerical and technical staff categories. Similarly, the lowest strata receive Rs. 167, 162 and 128 for each of the three (medical, clerical and technical) categories respectively.⁷

Like the managerial class, they too are entitled to some benefits in addition to salary. Some of the benefits given to this lower middle class are similar to those of labourers as we shall see later in this chapter. They are given free residential quarters and are generally provided with rations and firewood facilities. However as compared to the labourers better treatment is meted out to them in all these respects for the lower middle class households have better housing facilities in terms of size and quality of accommodations and invariably they receive more quantity in firewood, tea and rationing distributions. Partly their perquisites resemble those of the managerial class in that the services of domestic servants are made available to the former as well, although not all of them are equal in this respect. Whereas those at the higher grade are entitled to regular services of the domestic servants, others get it only occasionally or only when pressing needs arise.

7. Ibid.

Initially these lower middle class jobs in Meenglas were exclusively held by the Bengalees. Over the years, the labourers of the estate have, however, fought out the 'babus' dominance and have been successful in placing into this middle class position, four non-Bengalee candidates who come from the working class background. But the remaining 15 posts are still held by the Bengalees whose attempt is always to push up their own candidates in the clerical staff category of the plantation organization, whenever new positions arise. The clerical staff, hence, constitute a class different from the managerial class on the one hand and the plantation labourers on the other. They definitely have interests of their own but mainly confined to maintaining the economic gains or advantages. However, the ethnic identities tend to weaken the formation of a distinct and definite middle class interests per se. By and large the clerks of non-Bengalee tribal origins tend to associate among themselves and with the class of plantation labourers with whom they have either kinship or ethnic ties. However, they differ from their kins in their life styles largely due to their association with the middle class Bengalee colleagues living side by side on the estate. Such a change is most evident in the fact that female members from the non-Bengalee middle class households, unlike those of the labourers' households, no longer work as wage earners in the plantation although the practice is widespread among the working class women in Meenglas as elsewhere. However as argued earlier, this middle class in general tends to

be dominated by the Bengalees whose solidarity is reinforced by their ethnic identity.

The employment of large labour force and the complex nature of work activities on the vast tracts of land under the plantation requires not only an overall administrative supervision by managers sitting in their office but also close observation of the actual work performed by the labourers in the field. All these necessitate a well-knit work organization found in every plantation estate in Jalpaiguri district. Such a rationalized system of work is one of the most pronounced characteristics that sets a plantation structure apart from the other agricultural undertakings and social arrangements on land particularly - the one found in a typical subsistence agricultural setting.

Invariably, the organization of work in plantation has a well defined pattern of authority and hierarchical structure of roles and functions performed by different layers. Hence even among the so-called labourers, there are differences with one another in the actual activity performed and in the remuneration received. Some of them, the more experienced, trustworthy and enthusiastic type, are entrusted with the job of supervising other labourers with a view to ensure that the assigned targets or quotas of work are fulfilled. Such 'on-the-spot' labourer-cum-supervisors naturally enjoy a higher status and power in the social hierarchy of the tea plantation estate. These 'on-the-spot' supervisors of day to day work, do not have to perform actual manual work regardless of whether they are in the sphere of manufacturing or in the

field work activity. They are however more extensively needed in the tea gardens of the estate rather than its manufacturing unit.

These supervisors in turn are neither designated alike by any single name nor do they all enjoy same status and authority. In the Meenglas Tea Estate, as in other estates of Jalpaiguri district, these supervisors belong to three distinct and well-defined categories - namely 'chaprasis', 'bahidars' and 'sardar-daffadars' in the descending order of hierarchy.

All these supervisors, without exception are in direct and constant touch with the actual workers in the garden as well as with other day-to-day activity that goes on elsewhere in the estate. The 'chaprasis' as superior field supervisors assess the nature of work to be conducted in the tea farms everyday and assign labourers accordingly to various sections of the farms. It is to them that the management gives instruction regarding the work that needs to be done in the different farms of the estate. There are four such supervisors in the Meenglas estate out of which two supervise farm activity in the Meenglas subdivision and the remaining two (i.e. one each) take care of the farms in Dalingkote and Bhutabari subdivisions. Bahidars are the next in hierarchy whose primary job is to mark the daily attendance of labourers engaged in the farms under the bahidar's jurisdiction. Like the chaprasis, one bahidar is assigned in each subdivision although more may also be appointed in case of a larger concentration of labour force in any given subdivision. Thus, there were two bahidars out of four in the Meenglas subdivision of the estate.

The third and the largest stratum of 'on-the-spot' supervisors are sardars and daffadars denoted two distinct categories. The latter were taken to mean supervisory personnel of the estate whereas the former - sardar - were those who had brought along with them batches of migrant labourers for the estate from their native places such as Chhotanagpur in Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.* Sardars in this sense were middle men for recruiting plantation labourers. Often, sardars were also daffadars (i.e. supervisory personnel on the tea farms) with the result that the two categories have merged with each other. Now they are identified as sardars only although sardari system has disappeared from the plantation scene in Jalpaiguri district. In the Meenglas estate occasionally some sardars are called daffadars also but it is more a vestige of the past practice. The sardars are associated with a given category of workers classified on the basis of either sex or age or both and it is their activities that the sardars supervise in day-to-day work. Their task range from assigning of work to each individual workers of their group to that of supervising his or her performance and work progress and that of the group as a whole, like chaprasis, they too are more useful personnel in the farm than in the manufacturing unit.

These three types of supervisors differ from the actual plantation labourers in that the former receive monthly salary and enjoy some authority and status that emanate from the type of work that they perform. In the organizational set-up of Meenglas, these

* This has been discussed earlier in Chapter III.

'on-the-spot' supervisory personnel are identified as subordinate staff, which includes besides the three categories of supervisory staff, some oil-men and a coal-feeder from the manufacturing unit and also some chaukidars, water carriers (to serve the labourers) and gardeners (working in the managerial bungalows). The only common element among them is that they all are salary-holders placed in three different pay scales having the basic salary of Rs. 98, Rs. 88 or Rs. 78.⁸ In all there were 100 workers in the subordinate staff of the estate. Of these 4 were chaprasis, 6 bahidars, 29 sardars, 26 chaukidars (watchmen); 8 drivers and the remaining 27 belonged to other category of workers (gardeners, oilmen, sweepers etc.). But there were some other sardars, chaukidars or others who were not being treated as the 'subordinate staff' of the estate. For example, there were 12 sardars who were being treated as the 'wage labourers' when we were doing the field work in Meenglas and so was the case with the some 36 chaukidars. Similarly, a majority of the water carriers and gardeners were being treated as the wage labourers. These ramifications tend to divide the same set of workers into distinct social categories because of the differential treatment they receive from the estate's management.

Barring the salary, the subordinate staff is kept almost at par with the ways labourers in Meenglas. Their houses are situated in the midst of the labourers' habitations and the quality of their dwellings is in no way superior to those of the labourers. The subordinate staff members too do not perceive subjectively any class difference between themselves and the

labourers. Their life style is similar to those of labourers in every respects. Unlike the female members of the clerical staff households, the female members of the households of subordinate staff work as wage earners with other fellow labourers whose works the subordinate staff supervises. All these similarities tend to be further reinforced by the fact that their ethnic composition also happens to be the same as that of the labourers. Hence, we have treated the subordinate staff households as belonging to the category of plantation labourers. Whether or not their actual life situations are identical will be seen only later in this chapter.

The subordinate staff households along with the actual labourers, hence constitute the most numerous social category of plantation labourers in the Meenglas Tea Estate. They are classified into two different categories: those working in the factory and the field workers (i.e. those working in the actual tea gardens). This classification is mainly meant for the purpose of general administration but it does reflect the type of work the two are engaged in the estate. The factory labourers are engaged in the processing and manufacturing of tea whereas the field labourers are primarily and directly involved in the cultivation of tea; a part of the field labourers is also comprised of those engaged in work associated with the transport, construction, dispensary, hospital, postal, domestic and similar other miscellaneous services in Meenglas. However the latter constitute only a small proportion of the total field workers in the estate. Such

workers are employed mainly in the Meenglas subdivision where the factory, the hospital and the bungalows of the managerial and clerical staff are all located. Hence the workers of the subdivision work full time in the non-plantation services of the estate. In the other subdivisions, barring a few exceptions, the labourers work mainly for cultivation of tea.

It is to be noted that there is no rigid distinction between categories of labourers and one may be required to switch over from one sphere of work to another. Such a change is not only permissible but also required mainly from 'field to factory' and is more common at the peak of the plucking season when additional hands are required for processing of tea at the factory which is normally run mainly with the help of temporarily employed labourers during the season. However, the change is permitted even otherwise either at the request of the labourer himself or by the order of supervisory or managerial staff. In fact, we did come across a few such cases in the course of our field work.

The plantation labourers, however, do not constitute a single homogeneous class. In the Meenglas subdivision proper than in the other subdivisions of the estate (which we have not included in our field work, see Chapter II), the class of labourers is more heterogeneous for the reasons stated above. Thus out of the 85 households studied from four habitations of the Meenglas subdivision, it was found that heads of 54 households were engaged in the actual tea cultivation. Of the remaining 31 households, 15 were working in the factory, 5 in transport, 6 in domestic services or

gardening and the rest 5 in hospital, school and the general repairs. Similarly, plantation labourers differ in the type of work engaged both in the manufacturing unit and in the tea farms as the discussion on the subordinate staff suggests. The heterogeneity is, however, not confined to the nature and type of work alone. It is equally reflected in the differences in the nature of remuneration received and its quantum. Thus, there are some salaried plantation labourers (the subordinate staff of the organization) and some receive wages at a rate higher than the rate paid to other plantation labourers. Hence, it is necessary to examine at length their socio-economic conditions and to see whether these heterogeneous categories could be placed in a single class situation.

The actual plantation workers as indicated earlier, are the daily-rated wage labourers who form the most numerous class in the social structure of Meenglas. In all there were 1904 such workers in Meenglas in 1976 when we collected data. There are two types of labourers. An overwhelming majority of labourers has security of job i.e. they are permanently employed by the estate. The others are however only temporarily employed by the estate*.

Though they all are daily-rated wage earners, the actual rates paid vary from one labourer to another. The two categories of male and female workers used to be paid at two separate rates

* There were 1410 permanently employed workers - 590 males; 718 females and 102 children. The number of temporarily employed labour force was 494 - 72 males; 231 females and 191 children.

Note: Children workers in Meenglas include those boys and girls who are below the age of 15.

until recently, but such discrepancies were done away within the Meenglas estate in 1976 only. Yet some differences in wage-structure do exist. At least a higher rate is paid to certain sets of adult male workers in the estate. We, thus, found two distinct rates of wages being received by the sample of 85 households of labourers whom we interviewed in Meenglas subdivision. 56 heads of these households were getting Rs. 4.30 per day; of the remaining 29 households, heads of 18 were being paid at the rate of Rs. 4.60 per day and the rate for the remaining 11 heads of households slightly exceeded Rs. 5.00 a day. But, as stated earlier, these last 11 were not actual wage labourers but salaried employees belonging to subordinate staff category in the organizational hierarchy of the plantation estate. The variation in the rate of wages is apparently marginal but it is likely to affect the overall life situations of the households considerably - particularly if three to four or even more members in a household are working. In addition to normal wages, the labourers are entitled to an extra remuneration especially at the peak of plucking season although for the labourers there is no change in 'eight hours a day' rule. In the plucking season; a minimum quantity of the leaves is fixed per labourer who is required to cover up his/her daily wage by fulfilling the minimum quota. The minimum quantity however varies for male and female workers. Above and over this, whatever quantity of leaves is plucked by labourers, he or she is paid extra wages at a rate of 10 paise per kilogram of tea leaves. In the non-plucking season, the extra wage remuneration is not altogether absent but

it is not very common either. The Table 5.1 presents the distribution of working members, their sex and the nature of employment of the 85 households we studied in the Meenglas estate.

Table 5.1

Distribution of Plantation Labourer Households by the Number, Sex and Nature of Employment of Working Members

Number of working members in the households	Number of households	Sex		Total	Nature of employment		Total
		Male	Female		Permanent	Temporary	
1	13	13	-	13	13	-	13
2	31	34	28	62	48	14	62
3	27	45	36	81	55	26	81
4	7	17	11	28	19	9	28
5	7	16	19	35	23	12	35
Total	85	125	94	219	158	61	219

It is clear from Table 5.1 that number of working members ranges from one to five in the households we studied. Whereas 44 households, i.e. over 51 percent of the total have two or less working members, the remaining 41 i.e. over 48 percent, have three or more working members. However, households with three working members far outnumber those with four and five members taken together. In our sample, 27 households had 3 working members each

and only 14 households had either four or five working members. The data, thus, indicate high degree of involvement of household members other than the head in the class of wage-earners. In fact, it is strikingly significant that out of 412 members of the 85 households, as many as 219 (i.e. over 52 percent) worked as wage labourers in the estate. Of these, 158 or over 72 percent of the total working members were permanently employed. Incidentally, unless a plantation labourer is permanently employed, he or she is not normally entitled to a house allotment in the Jalpaiguri tea estates today. It hardly needs to be reemphasized, therefore, that the 85 households of our sample taken from Meenglas had at least one working member in the permanent employment of the Meenglas Tea Estate.

The high rate of work participation by women members of labourers households suggests that for most of households it is more a matter of need than of choice. This is evident in the fact that over 42 percent of the total working members of the 85 households were female-workers. In this sense, their contribution both to plantation economy in general and to their respective family incomes in particular is considerably high in Meenglas. The situation in Sanyasikata - the subsistence village discussed earlier in Chapter IV, is quite to the contrary as we shall see later in the following chapter.

The Meenglas estate provides the labourers with various facilities, such as free housing accommodation, concessional rationing, free firewood distribution, maternity leave for married

female workers and the usual sickness allowance, bonus, provident fund etc. These facilities are common to all and hence they do not contribute to differentiation of households in terms of household income as such. However, some labourer households possess kitchen gardens just adjacent to their dwellings and sometimes they are also allotted a free grant of small plots of lands by the estate management for the purpose of ordinary cultivation. Such plots are generally at some distance from their houses. These grants are made from that part of the estate which is not under actual tea plantation. For the management such allotments serve twofold purposes. First, it ensures optimum utilization of land under lease. Secondly, it ties the labourer households to the plots of land which in fact acts as an added incentives. For the labourers on the other hand, possessing small plots of land is a source of supplementing family income which in turn provides them a sense of security. Such plots are tilled by the labourers and the other members of the family in spare time. Non-working members of the household too help in cultivation of kitchen garden and other plots of land. This way the entire household of a plantation labourer functions as an economic unit geared to work activities that will ensure family subsistence and stability.

The actual life situations of labourer households thus vary from one another in terms of the number of working members, rate of wages received, nature of employment in the estate as well as access to free land grant. All of these decisively affect the total income of the households of the labourers. The placement of

a household in a given economic structure is usually taken as the basis of class differentiation. Hence, it would be of interest to find out whether the 85 households of plantation labourers as a whole constitute a single homogeneous class in this limited sense of identical class situation. Table 5.2 presents the distribution of labourer households in various income group in an attempt to ascertain their objective life conditions and thereby also to determine their class position. But, as has been argued in the subsistence setting, total household income as such is an inadequate and often misleading criterion in comprehending the class situation. Hence, in Table 5.2 we have taken the per capita income as the basis to ascertain the extent of differentiation among the plantation labourers in Meenglas.

Table 5.2

Distribution of Households by the Number of
Working Members and Per Capita Income

Per Capita Income (in Rs.)

Number of working members in household	201- 300	301- 400	401- 500	501- 600	601- 700	701- 800	801- 900	901- 1000	1000 or more	Total
1	1	1	3	-	2	-	-	-	6	13
2	1	6	9	6	2	-	5	-	2	31
3	-	2	5	7	9	3	-	1	-	27
4	-	-	1	2	2	1	1	-	-	7
5	-	1	1	2	1	1	1	-	-	7
Total	2	10	19	17	16	5	7	1	8	85

Clearly then the plantation labourers vary with one another in terms of their objective economic conditions and life situations. We have taken per capita income of Rs. 500 as the minimum requirement for a family sustenance in the subsistence setting. Accordingly, the whole 85 households of our study may be placed into various class positions in accordance with this criterion. Thus, households having per capita income of Rs. 500 and below, constitute the class of poor labourers to us (i.e. those who are below the subsistence level). By the same token, the households in the range of Rs. 501 to 700 have been taken as forming a class of subsistence labourers; those between Rs. 701 to 900 as a class of substantial labourers and those above Rs. 901 as a class of rich labourers. The Table 5.2 shows that there are 9 households in our sample of 85 having the per capita income of Rs. 901 and more who in fact constitute the rich stratum among the plantation labourers. Similarly, there are only 12 households in the category of labourers with substantial per capita income of Rs. 701 to 900. In contrast, there are 33 and 31 households respectively which form the subsistence and poorer sections among the plantation labourers in our sample from the Meenglas estate. The data also show that the class position does not correspond necessarily with the number of working members in the households. In fact none of the 14 households which have either four or five working members each is in the topmost stratum and only 4 of them have been able to come up to the level of substantial income category (i.e. Rs. 701-900). Of the remaining 10 households, 7 are at the subsistence level and

3 even below to the poor (below subsistence) class category. On the other hand, out of the 9 households in the economic strata, 8 households had either only one or two working members and only one household had three working members. Similarly 8 of the 12 households from the class of substantial category and 26 out of the 33 households from the class of subsistence category hail from households with one to three working members. Whereas households with one to two working members mainly contribute to substantial class category, it is the household with three working members that dominate the subsistence class category. The remaining 31 households comprise the class of poor labourers. Of these, 28 households came from households with one to three working members. Incidentally, it is to be noted that households with two working members contributed as many as 16 of these 28 households. The data thus show that the bulk of the plantation labourers belongs to either poor or subsistence class category though there are also a few in substantial and rich class categories. It has also been found on examination that the households of subordinate staff do not at all constitute a single class category. In fact of the 11 such households, only two had a per capital income of Rs. 901 or more, which was our basis to constitute the top economic strata. Of the remaining 9 households, 4 households had a per capital income of Rs. 701 to 900 and 5 of Rs. 501 to 700. They thus constituted the substantial and subsistence class categories respectively of the differentiation among the plantation labourers. The plantation labourers, hence cannot be said to be constituting a

homogeneous 'class-in-itself' though they tend to identify themselves with one another in relation to the other social classes in the plantation estate of Meenglas.

This brings us to the topic of nature and type of relations, involved in the production process and hence also the relationship between the labourers and the controllers of power in the social structure of the plantation village. The difference in the nature of work performed by labourers in the tea farms and by those in the manufacturing unit tends to be of little consequence in so far as the relations of production are concerned.

The relations of labourers with the managerial class which represents the interests of the owners of the means of production is more or less the same as one usually finds in any large scale industrial establishments. The authority to make decisions is concentrated into the hands of the managerial staff of the estate. They run the estate with a perfectly capitalist motive and through highly rationalized system of work, cost-benefit analysis and so on. The wage labourers whether field labourers actually engaged in tea cultivation or those working as factory labourers all participate in production process but have no control over the major means of production in the Meenglas estate. Even those households of labourers who have small plots of land do not enjoy any heritable tenurial rights over the land allotted to them, although, it remains under their control so long as their family members continue to stay in the estate. Similarly, labourers do not have any legal rights over tractors, machines, trollies, fertilizers,

pesticides and other instruments and inputs involved in the plantation's production process.

In spite of such basic similarities between field and factory labourers on the one hand and the management on the other, some differences exist between those of farm labourers and factory labourers in their relation to the management. On the tea farms as such it is mainly the labour power rather than machines or equipments that is required. There, the planting of tea, grafting, draining, weeding, plucking and similar tasks are such that either mechanical devices and implements are non-existent or where they are available, the company's management is disinclined to introduce them in the estate to avoid large capital investment. Of these, plucking of tea leaves is most important and its operation normally spreads over a span of six to eight months. Each of these work-activities require some minimum implements but some of these are sometimes not provided by the management. The result is that the plantation farm labourers have to contribute their own implements in such cases. For example, we found in course of our field work that labourers without any exception used two distinct types of bag for carrying tea leaves during the plucking operation. However only one of these was provided by the management. Similarly, it was discovered that all those engaged in replanting and reclaiming of land in the year preceding to our field work, had to contribute their own implements like axe and spade in the course of work. Similar instances were also reported in some cases of labourers engaged in weeding and draining. Labourers also buy some of

instruments that are used for their protection from sun and rain as well as the clothes as those provided by the management, tend to be of inferior quality. Thus, the Meenglas plantation estate which is broadly run on the line of capitalistic production, tends to resort to precapitalistic modes of exploitation of the labour in order to reduce the size of capital expenditure and investment. The helpless labourers, dependent on the estate for work have no option but to buy implements by themselves if they wish to remain in work. Allotment of land and kitchen gardens to labourers do attach them to the plantation estate and it is yet another example of the combination of capitalistic interests and precapitalistic forms of inducements.

The Meenglas estate is thus basically run in the way and the manner in which a modern industrial enterprise is run. Land as well as labour is centrally controlled and social relationship is patterned if not determined, by the organizational hierarchy of the enterprise. Labourers, thus, hardly come in direct contact with the management. Their only interaction occurs when the managerial staff proceeds to tea farms or the manufacturing unit for the general inspection or whom labourers have some problems or issues on which the consent or decision of the management need to be solicited. For instance, they are expected to approach the management for obtaining the permission to leave the estate and to release the provident fund; for replacement of one family member by another in a permanent job; for acquiring free-grant land for personal cultivation and for many other similar matters. However,

even in connection with these, the labourers often approach the management only through the office staff. Labourers, thus, come in direct and more frequent contact with the clerical staff — the babus than with the management. This is inevitable as the clerical staff is mainly responsible for the distribution of wages, goods and other services that are due to the labourers. The clerical staff thus not only distribute instruments such as umbrella, wrappers, spades, knives etc. (which are used for their personal protection as well as for work) but also determine the wages of individual labourers and rationing quota of labourers households. They also record the amounts of tea plucked by the labourers and determine the wages accordingly. Similarly, they facilitate the repayment of bonus and provident fund besides of course employing temporary labour force both in the tea farms and the manufacturing plants from the labourers' households within the estate. All these give a considerable leverage to the class of clerical staff in the estate. Naturally, labourers feel resentment and indignance towards them — more so because they are dominated by an ethnic group (i.e. the Bengalees) that has no working class base in the plantation estate.

Labourers have been classified into two distinct groups of 'subordinate staff and workers' in the organizational hierarchy of the estate. The main task of the subordinate staff is, as stated earlier, to supervise the daily routine work on the spot. Hence, they are in constant interaction with labourers both on the field and outside. This is enhanced by the fact that their

houses are situated side by side with those of the workers. The interaction between the two sections is cordial which is further reinforced by their kinship ties and ethnic identities. Clearly then, labourers do not consider the subordinate staff as a 'distinct class' nor do the subordinate staff consider themselves as different from the workers. However, the subordinate staff members do enjoy a status higher than that enjoyed by the labourers. This disparity is due to their higher placement in the organizational hierarchy. Yet they do not wield power and authority as done by the babus.

The plantation labour force in Meenglas has been applied traditionally by some tribal groups who still continue to dominate even today. The Table 5.3 presents the ethnic composition of the 85 households studied in the Meenglas estate.

Table 5.3

Ethnic Composition of the Households of
Plantation Labourers in Meenglas

<u>Name of tribe</u>	<u>Number of households</u>
Munda	35
Oraon	12
Kheria	6
Proja	9
Godba	8
Baraik, Saora and others	10
Non-tribal group	5
<u>Total</u>	<u>85</u>

The data show that 80 out of 85 households have tribal origins; coming mostly from such tribal groups as the Munda, Oraon, Kheria, Godba, Proja and Saora. Thus of the 80 tribal households, 35 came from the Munda tribe, 12 from the Oraon; 6 from the Kheria, 9 from the Proja; 8 from the Godba, and the remaining 10 from such groups as the Saora, Baraik and others. The 5 non-tribal households belonged to the low caste Hindus - 3 of them being Ghamars migrated from Bihar and 2 were Tamangs from Nepal. A large majority of these labourers' households (71 out of 85) comprise of migrants. The heads of the remaining 14 households were born in the Meenglas estate; their parents instead of returning to their native places, had settled in the estate's habitations. They were encouraged to do so by the management as the plantation labour was scarce and the settled labour provided a stable work force. The migrants were mainly from Bihar and Orissa. Thus of the migrant households, 37 came from Bihar, 15 from Orissa, 5 from Madhya Pradesh, and the remaining 14 from other estates or villages in the district. Their migration was however not of recent origin. Majority of them i.e. over 60 percent (i.e. 43 households) in the Meenglas habitations had come under the system of recruiting agency which was in vogue until 1953. Of the remaining 28 households, only one had settled in the estate during the last 10 years. In fact, migration from one estate to another is now rare because of surplus labour force within the Meenglas estate. As a result, whenever additional work opportunity arises - particularly during the peak of the plucking season - local men (dependents of

labourers already employed) are preferentially recruited as there is pressure from labourers of the estate. Outsiders are employed only when it is unavoidable. However, in the past, this has seldom happened in the Meenglas estate. The surplus labour force itself has to remain without work for the greater part of the year because the peak of plucking season lasts for 4 to 5 months only. Off season they move out in search of job either in the subsistence sector or in more distant places to work ~~and~~^{but} as road, bridge or the building construction sites. These labourers involvement elsewhere thus serves as an important point of contact of the plantation estate with the outside world. Visits to the neighbouring markets do facilitate similar contact with the outside world through the network of merchants, traders, shop-keepers and subsisting cultivators who also produce for the market partly. Similar small markets are also held in the tea estate on the weekly pay days - which is visited by the shop-keepers, merchants and others in addition to some cultivators from the neighbouring subsistence villages. The contact of the plantation labours is thus more deeply rooted with merchants and shop-keepers. Consequently, the shop-keepers and merchants have become an important source of credit for the plantation labourers. The credit is more often channelised through grocers and shop-keepers in and around the estate although the amounts lent by them are relatively small. Thus they had supplied loans worth Rs. 2695) 32.08 percent of the total amount owed by the labourers). Equally important are the merchants of neighbouring towns or places who provided Rs. 2550

(30.36 percent) of the total amount. The remaining credit Rs. 3155 (37.56 percent), was, however, obtained from the relatives and the professional moneylenders; the latter's contribution was as large as Rs. 1200 of the total. With the exception of professional moneylenders; the grocers, shop-keepers and merchants do not normally charge any interest but raise the prices of commodities in order to cover the interest they would have otherwise earned.

Although the number of plantation labourers' households indebted are more as compared to those of agricultural labourers, the amount indebted by plantation labourers was 8400 as against Rs. 12600 of the agricultural labourers from the subsistence village - Sanyasikata. The average amount indebted was Rs. 112 for the plantation labourers whereas the same was Rs. 268 for the agricultural labourers. Obviously the plantation labourers are more comfortably placed as compared to agricultural labourers and that they make regular repayment of their debts. Paradoxically, however the plantation labourers are constantly in debt. Their misery due to indebtedness is further heightened by usurious methods of book-keeping by shop-keepers and the merchants. Although labourers are by and large illiterate; they are aware of such practices but helpless in the absence of any alternative source of credit.

Chapter VI

Comparison of the Subsistence and Plantation Settings

The district of Jalpaiguri has two distinct and well entrenched economies and hence two distinct types of agrarian social structure and class relations have been fairly established so far. The detailed account of the two villages in Jalpaiguri district, given in the foregoing chapters, reveals that not only the historical development in the two settings followed different paths, but also they have peculiar class composition and class relations remarkably different from one another.

Thus the class structure in the plantation village consisted broadly of the managers, the babus and the plantation labourers. None of these possessed any rights - legal or customary over the vast tracts of land under the plantation estate nor had they any ownership or even shareholder's rights over the processing plants of the Meenglas Tea Estate. On the contrary, all the three classes provided services of one type or the other to the owners of the estate for which they were paid salary or wages. The managers co-ordinated the overall field activity of the estate such as plucking, weeding, replanting, pruning, nursery reserve etc. and looked after the day-to-day administration including disbursement of salary - wage, housing construction, medical and transport facilities and requirements and similar other administrative activities.

The babus work in the office of the estate; their work-activity range from general record keeping of the various activities such as amounts of tea plucked or manufactured; nature and extent of field work done; maintaining of labourer's provident and bonus files; arrival and disposal of goods to that of preparation of weekly wages and determining rationing quotas for labourers. Finally the class of plantation labourers - the most heterogeneous category consists of field supervisors, bahidars, chaukidars, and field and factory labourers besides domestic servants. Of these, some received salaries; but most received wages. Nevertheless, in terms of their style of life and their living and working condition they all formed one class category.

The agrarian structure in the subsistence village, however, presented a different picture. It comprised of 'rich', 'substantial', 'subsistence' and 'poor' peasants besides the landless, with the top two class positions mainly occupied by 'owner', households. Most of the 'subsistence' and 'poor' peasants were either 'owners' with small landholding or sharecroppers; those agricultural labourers who held patches of some land were all poor peasants in terms of per capita income. The landless were in fact a little better off. The class structure was hence mainly of large land owners, medium land owners, small land owners-sharecroppers and the agricultural labourers. The large size land holders generally cultivated the land with the help of yearly employed servants as well as daily rated wage earners. They also leased out a part of their lands on sharecropping

arrangement. The medium size landowners cultivated their land themselves with the help of daily wagers although some of them also did engage yearly employed servants. Small landowners and share-coppers cultivated their holdings themselves with the help of family labourers and also daily wagers if necessary. The agricultural labourers on the other hand, provided the labour power. Sharecropping helps the poor to find subsistence for their families; to those who let out their land on adhiari, the system offers the best means to get land cultivated and earn some profits with the least investment.

The comparable classes were the 73 households of agricultural labourers (with 334 family members) from the subsistence village - Sanyasikata and 85 plantation labourers' households (with 412 members) from the Meenglas Tea Estate. The average size of a household in the subsistence village is 4.5 as compared to 4.8 members in the plantation village. Similarly, the average number of working members in the subsistence setting is 1.7 in contrast to 2.5 in the plantation. The total working members in labourer households form 37.7 percent of the total population of Sanyasikata hamlets we studied. Of the 126 working labourers only 16 were women who were mainly employed by large landowners for such domestic works as cleaning, and pounding of paddy. Only occasionally, they were seen working in the farms and that too when their husbands or parents took contracts of piece work at a fixed rate. In the plantation, however, the number of working members in labourers' households was 219 out of the total of 412 family

members i.e. over 52 percent of the total population of the habitations studied. This is largely due to high rate of turnover of women workers who participate in the field activity of the tea estate. In fact 94 out of 219 workers (over 42 percent of the total workers) were females. As compared to the women in plantation setting, women in the subsistence village play a relatively minor role in the economic production. The differences in the two settings are however not confined to the extent of women's participation in work activity alone. They are equally seen in the nature of employment, wage structures, rates of wages, hours and nature of work, benefits and facilities received, i.e. in the working conditions of labourers in the two settings.

The social structure of the plantation village, unlike that of the subsistence village, provides security of employment to its labourers. At least one member from every household (out of 85 we studied), was permanently employed in the estate. Thus, 159 out of the total of 219 workers (over 72 percent) were permanently employed and hence had worked throughout the year. The rest were temporarily employed and were dependents belonging to the 85 households studied. The latter, 60 temporarily employed, remain without work in the non-plucking season which is comparable to the lean season in the subsistence setting. In the subsistence village most of the labourers served more than one employer-landowner either within or outside the village. Their contract binds them to work only on daily basis, with the result that some, if not all, labourers have sometimes to go without employment

particularly in the lean season. On an average a daily wager in Sanyasikata remains unemployed for two months and his condition resembles to that of the temporarily employed in the plantation estate — the only difference being that the latter serves only one employer at a time except in the non-plucking season. The yearly employed servants, however, serve only one employer for the duration of their contracts. At the expiry of a contract, it may or may not be renewed. Therefore the security of job does not make the labourers less dependent on their employers. The structural dependence renders them weaker in bargaining position as is the case with the temporarily employed ones. The permanently employed labourers of the plantation estate have much better security of job which is legally protected.

The daily wage agricultural labourers, hence, can move out of their villages freely in search of job in cities and towns in the lean season. So is the case with the temporary plantation labourers who either seek seasonal work in the subsistence villages (especially the female workers) or frequently move to road construction sites for work. The labourers in the subsistence village receive very unstable wages generally ranging from Rs. 3 to Rs. 4 per day if paid in cash. Part payment of wages in kind is not uncommon. The kind wage rate is relatively more stable; and when made in cash and kind combined, the actual wage rate fluctuates sharply depending on the season. Generally, cash wage per day is Rs. 1 or 1.50 in lean season and goes up to Rs. 2 or 2.50 in the peak season. In contrast, the plantation wage rate is more stable for

both the seasons and for both the permanently and temporarily employed. Thus every adult male or female worker in the estate is paid Rs. 4.30 as the daily wage.

The plantation labourers also have ample scope to earn extra wages on account of the specificities of the system of wage determination which are absent in the subsistence village. For example, in the plantation estate, the basic wage is earned on the basis of a fixed quantity of tea plucked; (in plucking season) over and above that he or she is paid extra wages though different for males and females. Similarly, piece work that commensurates with Rs. 4.30 i.e. hazira rate is assigned in the non-plucking season and extra wages are paid if the assigned quota is exceeded. These features of the plantation sector are, however, gradually disappearing partly due to introduction of mechanization in farms and partly due to the surplus labour obtained in practically every tea plantation estate. The agricultural labourers in the subsistence setting on the contrary are made to work from sunrise to sunset so that they do not enter into other work contract. In the piece work system each contract is made for a specified amount of work at the commencement and it lasts until the work targets assigned are completed. At its termination, a fresh contract on a lump sum payment may again be entered into by the labourers. The only similarity thus lies in the fact that there are both hourly basis and piece work basis of work in the two settings. However in plantation labourers can earn extra wages even within the hourly basis of work but in the subsistence village they cannot. An added

disadvantage in the subsistence setting results from the fact that, unlike the plantation labourer who works for specified hours (8 hours) a day, an average agricultural labourer in the subsistence has to work for more than 9 hours a day (on an average). The piece work system is preferred partly because it ensures better wages and partly because it affords the labourer some freedom.

The stable wage rate, the nature of employment and the availability of extra work and remuneration all have substantial bearing on the life conditions and experiences of the plantation labourers as compared to those of the agriculture labourers. Thus there are only 2 agricultural labourers households in subsistence in contrast to 9 of the plantation labourers who belonged to the top category of class hierarchy determined by per capita income. Similarly, there are again only 2 households of agricultural labourers in subsistence village who fell in the class division of 'substantial peasants' whereas 12 plantation labourers' households belonged to that category. At the subsistence level again there are only 8 agricultural labourers from Sanyasikata village as against 33 from the plantation labourers households in the Meenglas estate. The bulk of agricultural labourers i.e. 61 households were below the minimum subsistence level in Sanyasikata. In the plantation sector there were only 31 labourers' households in this class. But interestingly enough indebtedness among plantation labourers' household was more common than it was among agricultural labourers in the subsistence village. Thus, 75 out of 85 i.e. over 88 percent of plantation labourers' household were indebted as against 47 out of

Thus the labourers in the subsistence village belong to same ethnic identity and most of them are either closely or distantly related. Similarly, the habitations in the plantation are inhabited by the migrants from the same region with the result that kinship and ethnic bonds tend to be quite strong. Yet the ethnic features of the two villages, present a striking contrast. Whereas one is populated with the Muslims, the other is predominantly inhabited by various tribal groups such as the Oraon, the Munda, the Kheria, the Proja, the Godba etc. These labourers were recruited from outside the state, much the same way, as the yearly employed servants in the subsistence sector are hired today, with a view to have labourer/labourers always at their command so that the employers' work does not suffer.

The difference in the class structure and class relations in the two settings are basically inherent in the nature of land control and land use in the two settings and in the specificities of the production forces and their historical development. The tea plantation economy was introduced in the district with a view to supply the overall demand of tea in the international market. Naturally, there was an urge for large scale production which would not have been possible to achieve under the pre-capitalistic forms of production such as peasant or landlord-tenant economy - sustained by cropsharing arrangements that were in vogue in Jalpaiguri district then.

Invariably, vast tracts of land came under the plantation estates and land and labour began to be controlled in a way as any

industrial enterprise would do. The plantation land was not leased out in parcels to the labourers under any temurial arrangement. On the contrary, the land was managed in large blocks under tea estates, which produce tea, collect, process, pack, ship, market and sell it in conformity with orthodox industrial patterns'.¹ Land control and utilisation were thus centralised. Similarly the large labour force recruited in the estate were not admitted as tenants with any rights over the land but merely as wage earners. Same is the case of those hired for office work, record keeping and also for managerial supervision of work activity. Consequently, the centralised organisation in plantation gave rise to a class structure composed of the managers, the babus and the plantation labourers.

The nature of land control and land use in the subsistence setting, however, has been markedly different. Here, crops like paddy, jute were produced although paddy was more prominent as it is the staple food of the district. Paddy is produced for the subsistence though part of it is also marketed by almost all categories of peasants in order to buy the essential commodities of life. Cultivation of jute - a major commercial crop in West Bengal did not have much bearing on the economy of the subsistence village that we studied. It was produced not for profits but only to obtain cash so as to buy the basic necessities during the winter season. On the whole, the subsistence setting functions in a complementary fashion in relation to the plantation economy and society.

1. See, Mitra in GWB, op. cit., 1961, p. 28.

Land is owned by many, and it is used differently in the subsistence village. Some cultivate the land themselves with the help of family members or by hire labour or cultivate partly by hired and partly by family labour. Some also lease out to others either partly or wholly on some tenurial arrangement - sharecropping being quite common. Hence, the class structure in the subsistence village consists of various categories; such as owners share-cropper's and the agricultural labourers. They are not internally homogeneous but are well differentiated in terms of land owned, per capita land, gross income of household and per capita gross income. Owners invariably got their lands cultivated either by sharecroppers or by hired labourers. Sharecroppers cultivated mainly with the help of their family labour although occasionally they do hire labour. The agricultural labourers lived on by supplying labour power to other social categories - owners and sharecroppers.

Plantation economy is in essence organised on capitalistic lines as far as the production process is concerned. Nevertheless it retains some interesting features that are typical of the pre-capitalistic forms of production-relations. As stated in Chapter V, the plantation estates use a part of its vast tracts of land to be allotted as free-grants for the personal cultivation to some of the labourers. Thus in 1948 out of 571.49 square miles of land under tea lease in Jalpaiguri, 89.46 square miles (15.65 percent of total) were set aside by the estates for agricultural purpose, and 58.34 square miles of areas (10.21 percent) were already under

such personal cultivation.² In 1954, the total lands under personal cultivation were 16.98 percent of the total area leased by the plantation estates.³ Today such features do exist but the tendency is to root out such features in the plantation society gradually. The existing situation in Meenglas may be taken as pointer to this. For example, earlier the Meenglas utilised 298.51 out of 507.49 hectares of the ancillary area, for personal cultivation by the labourers. On the other hand only 573.25 hectares of land were actually under the tea cultivation. The bulk of this land (land under personal cultivation) has, however, been surrendered by the estate to the government under the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act in 1975. Thus only 56.00 hectares of land have now remained under the personal cultivation of the labourers.⁴ Clearly then the land used for pre-capitalist form of inducement and exploitation in the plantation economy of the district is shrinking. Earlier free-grants to labours were used to entice them to settle on the estate, instead of returning to their native places after completing the term of the contract. Today, the labour power is in surplus; strikes and gheraos have become a part of the plantation society, the planters have hence, surrendered easily such lands to the government taking them out from the personal cultivation because these lands had built the bargaining power of the labourers.

2. S.K. Halder, op. cit., p. 70.

3. GOI, Report of the Plantation Enquiry Commission, Part 1 - Tea, India, 1956, p. 198.

4. The Meenglas Tea Estate Records: File - Budget Season 1971 and 1975.

The free-grant lands were or are still cultivated by the labourers themselves. Cultivation work - such as ploughing, harvesting, replanting etc. is carried out on week-ends with the help of other labourers in the estate on payment of wages and food. Other works such as weeding, draining etc. are performed by family members of labourers in their spare time. The plantation estate does not charge any rent on these lands though it was used to determine the quota of rationing distribution (mainly during the period of depression) depending upon the size of plot allotted to a labourer's family.

Similarly, labourers are made to contribute some of the implements required for the various works of the plantation estate every now and then, especially when the estate management demands from them unusual or irregular work such as uprooting of the plants, draining, weeding, etc. To get such works done labourers must possess or borrow such implements. Even when works are done on a regular basis not all the implements that the plantation labourers require or use, are given by the management. Nor do the labourers demand these implements.

Labourers and their family members were also supplied with outfits before their departure from recruiting centre to the plantation estate.⁵ On their arrival in the estate they were also

5. Tea District Labour Association Handbook (Part 1), 1954-55, p. 39.

Note: Adults (over 12) were provided with one dhoti/sari, two blankets, and a pair of lota and thali; children (4-11 years) with a dhoti, blanket and a cup each, and infants with one banian and kurta. Travelling and daily allowance for the journey were also paid.

supplied with additional utensils, some implements, and regular rations - mostly grains and grocery items at concessional prices.⁶ The plantation labourer thus lives comparatively a secured life from the very beginning under the paternalistic treatment by the estate itself. The protection not only binds the labourer to the estate but also helps to perpetuate pre-capitalistic relations within the frame work of a basically capitalist mode of production.

Another interesting feature of production relations in the plantation villages emerges from the fact that the life, the tribal migrant labour led was quite simple. Satisfied with the bare living the estate could keep them happy with minimum wages. Consequently the development of plantations did not affect the subsistence economy adversely. The purchasing power of labourers on plantation had been gradually reduced due to a stable wage rate on the one hand and steady rise in the price of various commodities due to increasing market circulation in the district on the other. The plantation estate provided them with health and medical care, housing and schooling facilities and grocery shops etc. Naturally, these facilities have tended to socially isolate the plantation society and have certainly minimized its impact on the surrounding subsistence village. In fact even the government and local bodies were absent in the plantation estate for all practical purposes so that quarrels, disputes and other problems were often brought to

6. S.K. Haldar, op. cit., p. 11.

Note: The labourers could get such things as rice, dal, chana, mustard-oil, gur, salt etc. at concessional prices. For instance, an adult could get 3 sairs and 8 chattaks of rice in 7 annas in 1948. The market rate of rice was 2 sairs per rupee in Jalpaiguri in September 1947.

the managers by the labourers' headmen and sardar for settlement. Hence neither a village council nor village court was considered desirable on the estate by the managers.⁷ As a result of all these, relations between the manager and the labourers were not strictly regulated on the basis of rational economic considerations; they were inclusive rather than exclusive, patron-client like and not strictly contractual. To a considerable extent the class relations in the Meenglas tea estate remain so even now.

Of course, markets in the tea estate and its neighbourhood had sprung up; to the raiylats and sharecropping peasants of the subsistence village too, these markets were accessible for selling their produce - rice, vegetables, oilseeds and the like. However, the system of subsidised consumer supplies to the plantation labourers as prevalent in the Meenglas estate as elsewhere had minimised the dependence of a vast number of consumers on these markets. The plantation estates which often procured these commodities for its labourers, did not depend on the locally-grown rice and other essential commodities. On the contrary, they purchased from big trading companies which obtained these partly from neighbouring subsistence villages but mostly from districts in lower Bengal and other provinces.⁸ For example, in 1961, the Indian Tea Association, Calcutta, and Messrs Steel Brothers supplied the food-stuffs to the tea estates of the Jalpaiguri district. The latter alone supplied 1,35,000 quintals of foodgrains of which

7. Detailed Report of the General Committee of the DPA, 1918, p. 8.

8. Ibid, p. 177.

44,100 quintals were obtained from the government; 10,000 quintals from Assam and 80,900 quintals from Orissa.⁹ The plantation economy thus restricts the growth of a well entrenched local market for the commodities produced in the non-agricultural sector of the district as they do not give a good demand. Consequently, consumer goods as well as grains and garden products, if brought for sale in the market, do not fetch adequate prices. This has dampening effect on the propensity of different categories of peasantry in the subsistence sector to undertake risks involved in commercial agriculture. This explains why Sanyasikata like many other villages in the non-plantation (i.e. subsistence) sector remains largely subsistence oriented.

It is interesting to note that labourers in the Meenglas estate as in any other, were not at all recruited from within the district, although pressure on land in the district as a whole had already begun to be felt around 1930 or so. On the contrary, the labour was recruited mainly from the tribal belts of Bihar, Central Province (now Madhya Pradesh) and Orissa and to some extent also from Nepal, which involved heavy expenditure. For example, the forwarding rate of an adult labourer from the recruiting agency of Ranchi and Lohardaga in Bihar, was something like Rs. 25.75 and Rs. 27.88 respectively.¹⁰ The tribal belts of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa were the catchment areas of plantation labour.

9. See, text of the speech of the Chairman, Tea Board, in Detailed Report of the General Committee of the DBITA, 1961, p. XVII.

10. Tea Districts Labour Association Handbook (Part 1), 1954-55, pp. 46-48.

Here the tribals were being denied of their rights in land and forest that passed progressively into the hands of outsiders - moneylenders, traders and professional classes - through usury.¹¹

It was therefore more than a coincidence that just when the British capitalists were establishing the plantations in the Jalpaiguri district, tribals were being deliberately pushed out of their areas by various strategies in search of alternative livelihood.¹²

Undoubtedly this seemingly smooth operation was conducted under the imperialist protection to the planters and plantation industry that served the interests of the metropolitan bourgeoisie instead of taking interest in general development of the district.

The labourers in plantation were not, hence as free as the free labour under an ideal-typical capitalist mode and relations production. The peculiar system of recruitment practically binds a labourer to his estate. They were expected to fulfill their contract generally lasting for 3 years of regular service to the estate after which they either returned to their native places at the expense of the estate, or settled in the same estate. Occasionally they either joined another estate or settled in the non-plantation tracts in the vicinity to undertake ordinary cultivation. The movement of labourers was hence closely observed by the estate managements. Chaukidars were assigned to check the absconding of labourers and to trace them if they succeeded in absconding. The

11. See, Bhowani Sen et al, op.cit., pp. 15-17. also K. Suresh Singh, The Dust Storm and Hanging Mist, 1966.

12. Bhowani Sen et al, op. cit., pp. 15-17.

estates had to entice labour by offering concessions and benefits. Eventually, since everybody's interests were involved, the estates introduced rules which required that the estate either returned the labourer to his former estate or paid compensation for the expenses incurred in recruiting him. In spite of such an understanding, enticement went about in the estates of Jalpaiguri.

The relations of production in Sanyasikata as elsewhere in the subsistence sector have remained unchanged and unaffected in spite of the introduction of capitalism in the form of plantation economy in the district. Of course, some plantation labourers, after completing their contract, had settled in the subsistence sector securing land on leases for personal cultivation as land was easily available then and rent was appreciably low.¹³ Once settled in the subsistence sector, they did not restrict their activity and mobility exclusively to that sector.* On the contrary, they seasonally provided their services to the plantation estates. The non-resident labour force found in the tea estates of Jalpaiguri generally consisted of the ex-garden labourers - also known as bustee labourers. In 1939, 5,983 out of 127,786 workers employed in the tea estates of Jalpaiguri were bustee labourers whereas their number was 6,883 out of 141,574 total workers in 1942.¹⁴ In 1948 out of the total workers of 155,820 (110,137 for European and 45,683 for Indian management) in the tea estates of Jalpaiguri,

13. Gruning, op. cit., p. 31.

14. D.V. Rege, Report on an enquiry into condition of labour in plantation in India, 1946, p. 74.

13,109 were bustee labourers of which 4,496 worked in the European farm and the remaining 8,613 in the Indian.¹⁵

But the bastee labourers (plantation labours) settled in cultivation, were unable to bring any change in the subsistence economy of the district. In fact, the stable wage structure and steady rise in commodity prices prevented any capital accumulation essential for changing the existing mode and relations of production in the subsistence economy. On the other hand the surplus generated by the plantation was however siphoned off by foreign capitalist interests. The social structure of a plantation tea estate, such as the Meenglas - seems to be maintained and sustained by exogenous forces that regulate the recruitment, distribution of food and other supplies on concessional rates and even restricts the movement on labourers. The control of the estate management is so complete that even the marketing of manufactured tea by private vendors or sellers is not permitted in Jalpaiguri. The district's tea production is next only to that of Assam in the whole of north-eastern India. Yet there are no local retain shops for selling tea. All the produce of the Meenglas estate, like many others, is normally packed and railed to Calcutta port for shipping to the U.K.. Some portion of it, is certainly auctioned at Calcutta's whole-sale market but every attempt was made to

15. S.K. Halдар, op. cit., pp. 150-157.

reduce its quota.¹⁶ Consequently, the surplus generated by plantation did not even partially come in circulation to initiate a development process outside the plantation. There was some attempt to bridge the gap between plantation economy and the subsistence economy of the district. It is a fact that the colonial government regulated the growth and direction of the plantation economy in the district by allocating land for tea in only those tracts that were not inhabited and by preventing the spread of plantations in the areas earmarked for ordinary cultivation. However, at the repeated request from ITPA the latter were made available for the cultivation of tea. Clearly then, there was a substantial increase in the number of Indian investors between 1918 and 1933.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the expansion of tea plantation and the resultant competition all over the world, had adversely hit the price of tea. The result was that the main tea producing countries of the world have to enter into an agreement in 1933 to regulate the export and extension of cultivation of tea. With this, even a hope of changing the subsistence economy had been fading out.¹⁸

The export trade in tea received all the facilities and protection from the imperialist government. This was evident in the extension of railways to the plantation area construction of

16. Griffith, op. cit., pp. 659-677.

Note: In fact, Indian Tea Association considered that tea normally sold in London, should not be offered for sale in Calcutta, but in 1917, a compromise was arranged under which, the sale in Calcutta of London tea should be restricted to 20 percent of teas catalogued for sale. The scheme worked well for two years.

17. Ibid., pp. 532-535.

18. Ibid., pp. 187-200.

roads and even in rent and and taxation structure applicable to the plantations of the district.¹⁹ The rent structure has already been referred to in Chapter III. As far as taxation is concerned, plantation estates barring the local cesses remained free from direct taxation during the initial phase. The import-export duty and other taxations too were imposed lately besides being flexible. Thus the export duty imposed on 1916 was abolished in 1927. In 1947 such duty was 2 annas per pound which was gradually going up and in 1955, it was 10 annas for a pound. Income-tax too was imposed as late as 1918 and in only that portion of the income which arise from business and not agricultural. The agricultural income tax on the plantation was introduced only in 1943 in Bengal. And the last to be introduced was the sale tax in 1959.²⁰

The plantation economy due to the protection it received, earned heavy profit and surplus, but it was not used for the over-all development of Jalpaiguri and its twin economies. As the investors were predominantly foreigners they siphoned off the surplus and profits earned from the plantation economy of the district a point made earlier. Of course, a part of the surplus was used but mainly for modernization of processing plants and for the improvement of the agriculture on the estate. There were Indian investors too but they followed the British counterparts because the surplus earned by them too did not return to the district for promoting the developmental activity of the district;

19. Ibid., pp. 636-656.

20. Ibid., pp. 557-576.

probably it was channelised to businesses in other places about which little record or study is available.

Naturally, the plantation economy failed to displace the subsistence economy of the district in spite of its existence for last 104 years or so. On the contrary they existed side by side almost as a symbiosis. The introduction of plantation had opened an avenue for raiyas of subsistence villages to sell their goods such as rice, dal, vegetables and others required in large quantities in adjoining plantations which gave them some cash to buy other essential commodities of life. At the same time plantation economy failed to develop a local market and had limited impact on the subsistence sector. Similarly, plantation depended on subsistence for only a part of their food stuff and commodity requirement because the bulk of it was acquired by the estate from outside the district. Similarly a part of the plantation labour force was obtained from the subsistence sector. Thus the two sectors worked and acted as a complementary to each other though only to a limited extent.

The coexistence is however seems to be gradually giving way in more recent times. Many of the characteristics that the plantation possessed have been eroded partly due to internal and partly due to external factors. For quite a few years from now, there has been no recruitment of labour from outside in the plantations. The last massive recruitment was done in mid-fifties. Today the labour force is in excess of the requirements of the estate which itself has practically stagnated in the past 15 years

or so. Hence, there is pressure from the labourers on management to employ only the dependent members of those already employed in the estate whenever additional work opportunities arise. Naturally, not only in flow of the labour from the subsistence setting has been stopped, but even labourers from other estate are by and large not employed by an estate. At least such is the case with the Meenglas tea estate which we studied. The dependents of plantation labourers households are moving out of the estate in search of work especially in the winter. The estate management too is now unable to match the facilities of wage enhancement, subsidised ration quotas, housing and free-grants of land with the rising cost of living. Taxes conspicuously absent, have been freshly being introduced such as export-import taxes, sale tax, income tax etc. At the same time, no alternative sources of livelihood seem to emerge in the district other than the stagnated plantation and the subsistence agriculture already under population pressure. The labourers are still immobile, educated members from labourers households want to move out but have no avenues to go. They invariably aspire for some clerical jobs of the estates which are now in the hands of the Bengalis.

This does not mean that agrarian social structure in subsistence economy has not changed at all. Lands under share-cropping arrangement have gradually begun to decline after the Bargadar's Act of 1955 came into effect. Consequently there has been steady growth in the number of agricultural labourers' families in the subsistence setting. One cannot also miss some of

the gradual changes in the mode of and relations of production in the subsistence villages of the district. For example, a few households in Sanyasikata exclusively relied on hired labour for the cultivation of their lands. Some of them were enthusiastic in modernising the method of cultivation in Sanyasikata by systematic draining and conservation of land, increasing inputs of fertilizers constructing ponds for storing water, introduction of new seed varieties and crops like wheat; two had purchased pump-sets for local-irrigation. These peasants, though, few, were hitherto associated with the production of paddy and jute primarily for their own maintenance. Thus symptoms of nascent capitalist development in an otherwise subsistence agriculture of Sanyasikata has begun to show up. Nevertheless, the development is very sluggish owing largely to the unavailability of extensive irrigation, and adequate as well as long term credit facility, indiscriminate procurement levy on rice, restrictions on free movement of products, and lack of transport facilities and also of capital investment either in the public or in private sector. Notwithstanding these, a new spirit of pineapple farming is increasingly visible in the subsistence sector to which Sanyasikata is no exception. It has come as a major booster to the agrarian economy of North Bengal in general and Jalpaiguri district in particular. The Bengal districts are estimated to have grown some 60,000 tonnes of pineapple in an acreage over 15,000 in 1976, earning about Rs. 10 lakhs in foreign exchange to the country.²¹ In Jalpaiguri, Rajganj police circle alone - where this field work

was conducted, there were 3500 acres of land under pineapple farming in 1974-75 as compared to 600 acres in 1973-74 which meant an increase of 2900 acres in a year.²² The cultivation of pineapple is thus rapidly growing in the subsistence villages of the district. But the investors in pineapple farming are predominantly neighbouring town-dwellers and some outsiders too. However, local peasantry - rich and substantial ones too are actively taking part in it. It remains to be seen therefore, whether the growth of pineapple farming is an ephemeral development or is able to displace the hitherto predominantly subsistence oriented economy and social structure of Sanyasikata which the plantations have failed to do so far.

21. See, The Economic Times, Oct. 1976, p. 4 and also The Times of India (Delhi), Aug. 1, 1976, p. 7.

22. The Agricultural Extension File of Block Development Office, Rajganj, Jalpaiguri.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

The two village social structures - one from the plantation and the other from the subsistence setting thus reflect two distinct modes and relations of production though they are far from the ideal type of 'capitalist' and 'subsistence' systems. The plantation production relations are patterned on the capitalistic mode and relations of production. Nevertheless they have some features that resemble in some way to the pre-capitalistic forms of exploitation. For example, wage labourers are made to contribute to inputs such as farm implements at the insistence of the planters. The tea estate management again gives free-grants of land (that is not under actual tea cultivation) to labourers for the personal cultivation as an added incentive to settle down on the estate. Also, the management restricts free recruitment of labourers and prefers to employ only the dependents of labourers' families from within the estate. Similarly, the subsistence production relations are dominated by self-cultivation of holdings primarily for family subsistence and to some extent by pre-capitalistic form of adhiari cultivation which still looms large. However, an incipient development of commercial-capitalist agriculture through hired labour has begun to show up within the subsistence framework of agriculture. Yet it is too sluggish to override the subsistence nature of agrarian economy and society.

What is interesting is that such a subsistence economy sustains itself side by side with the plantation enterprises which introduced capitalism and penetrated the Jalpaiguri rural landscape as early as 1874. What probably explains such a long coexistence of the two sectors is the fact that the subsistence and plantation economies in the district have been integrated first into a larger framework of the colonial economy and later in the post-colonial development of dependent capitalism. The plantations initiated by foreign investors under the imperialist protection simply siphoned off the vast surplus and profits generated by the plantation economy of the district. Since the surplus was not reinvested by the foreigners, who had hardly any interest in the overall development of Jalpaiguri district and its economy, the dependent capitalism could not displace the economy of subsistence agriculture that still needed to feed the most. On the contrary, the two formed a kind of symbiosis.

What the picture emerges from the contemporary scene in the agrarian economy of the Jalpaiguri district is then that the social structure in the plantation sector is basically patterned on the capitalistic mode and relations of production although it has also important remnants of pre-capitalistic modes of patronisation and exploitation. Hence, the plantation economy is capitalistic but not in the ideal-typical sense. Similarly the subsistence social structure is basically self-sufficiency oriented. Yet within itself a rudimentary form of capitalistic mode and relations of production has germinated within the rubric of a

pre-capitalistic and subsistence oriented sharecropping cultivation. Again, it is neither independent of the market relations nor is it free from dependence on credit sources. Naturally, the subsistence village in Jalpaiguri is not ideal-typically subsistence oriented in the sense Redfield and Shanin have conceptualized 'subsistence' peasant society. For over a century now the two polar types of modes and relations of production have coexisted in Jalpaiguri. Changes in both are visible but they are sluggish, and are certainly not decisive enough to make any forecasts on the course of development, the agrarian social structure and class relations in the two types of villages is likely to take in years to come.

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Appendix - A

Glossary

Glossary

Aman	- Paddy crop sown in July-September and reaped in December-January
Aus	- Paddy sown in March-April and reaped in June-July
Bhadoi	- Variety of aus paddy sown in April-May and reaped in July-September
Zamindar	- Former landholder or revenue official conferred proprietary right by the British Government
Jotedar	- Tenant holding lease directly from the government or from the zamindar
Chukanidar	- Subtenant under jotedar
Dar-chukanidar	- Subtenant under chukanidar
Raiyat	- Cultivator with some legal rights in land
Underraiyat	- Cultivator possessing some legal rights but inferior to those of raiyats
Adhiar	- Cultivator on sharecropping arrangement without any legal rights
Bargadar	- Same as adhiar
Jots	- Piece of land obtained in lease by the jotedar
Tehsil	- Area under the jurisdiction of revenue collecting officer
Adhi	- Sharecropping arrangement
Mouza	- Cluster of habitations forming an unit for the purpose of revenue administration
Anchal	- Group of habitations forming an unit for the purpose of social welfare and developmental activities
Khas mahal	- Land actually under the control of the state
mulai	- Piece-work system in the subsistence village
malyali	- Inhabitant of Kerala

Line	- Habitation known as lines in the plantation village
Babus	- Clerks working in tea estates
Bahidar	- A subordinate staff member recording the daily attendance of labourers on work
Chapراسى	- Field-supervisor superior to sardar
Sardar	- On-the-spot field or factory supervisor. Earlier used for recruiting agent of plantation labourers
Daffadar	- On-the-spot field or factory supervisor
Chaukidar	- Watchman
Bara Saheb	- Manager
Chota Saheb	- Assistant Manager
Hazira	- Amount of work fixed to earn daily wage rate
Murhari	- Hired official taking care of farm and financial transactions in the subsistence village

Appendix - B

Questionnaire

Schedule for Owners and Tenants

1. Household

- 1.1 Name of village:
 1.2 Ethnic group:
 1.3 Subgroup (jati):
 1.4 Religion
 1.5 Members of household (total number including the head of the household)

Sl. No.	Relation with the head of the household	Age	Sex	Education	Primary occupation	No. of months engaged in primary occupation
1						
2						
...						
10						

contd.

Sl. No.	Annual income primary occupation	Secondary occupation	No. of months engaged in secondary occupation	Annual income from secondary occupation
1				
2				
...				
10				

- 1.6 Any other source of income: bamboo groves/orchards/fishery/dairy farm/rented house/any other (specify)
 1.7 Total annual income of the household:
 1.8 Break up of annual expenditure (in rupees): a) foodgrain; b) clothes; c) house repair/maintenance; d) celebrations/festivals; e) routine agricultural; f) any other (specify)
 1.8.1 Total annual expenditure of the household:

2. Investment (only for those who are able to save something)

- 2.1 How do you make use of the saving: (i) for investment in modernization (canals, drainage, shade construction, new tools, experimental seeds etc.); (ii) for credit and money-lending; (iii) for non-agricultural productive investment (business, farms, fishery etc.); (iv) non-agricultural non-productive (gold, ornament, house construction, etc.); (v) any other (specify)

3. Total Production and Marketing for the Last Year

Crops	Production			
	from self cultivation	from adhi	from any other	Total produce

Paddy

Jute

Any other(specify)

contd.

Crops	Marketing				
	Purchaser				
	Quantity sold	Village bania	Itinerant merchants in hats	Govt. agency	Any other

Paddy

Jute

Any other(specify)

Crops	Mode of purchase		
	Wholesales	Broker	Month

Paddy

Jute

Any other (specify)

3.1 Have you to buy foodgrain from market:

3.1.1 If yes, for how many months:

4. Credit and Indebtedness

4.1 Are you self-sufficient or/need credit?

4.2 Are you indebted now?

4.2.1 If no, were you indebted anytime during the last 10 years?

4.2.2 If yes (either for 4.2 or 4.2.1), for how long and how much amount you owe or owed

4.3 Reason of indebtedness in order of priorities: (i) non-agricultural (grain, debt, social celebrations etc.); (ii) routine agricultural (seeds, cattles, manures etc.); (iii) improvement in agriculture (new machines, canals, etc.)

4.4 Your source of credit: bank/mahajan/govt. agency/jotadar/rich farmer/shop-keeper/any other (specify)

4.5 Form in which credit received: Cash/kind/commodity

4.6 Duration within which repayment is or was to be made: (i) less than 3 months; (ii) less than 6 months; (iii) more than 6 months (specify)

4.7 What security did you give to get the credit? Mortgaged land/valuables/promisory note/any other (specify)

4.8 In what way are you to repay or you repaid the credit? Cash/kind/service/surrendering the produce/market adjustment/any other (specify)

4.9 Rate of interest:

4.10 Creditor's (i) ethnicity, (ii) subgroup

5. Land Control and Management

- 5.1 How much land have you at present?
- 5.2 At what distance from your village: (i) within one sq.mile and less; (ii) more than one sq.mile (specify)
- 5.3 How much of it is under: (i) proprietary ownership and under self cultivation; (ii) leased in from others (if any); (iii) usufructuary mortgage (if any); (iv) proprietary ownership but leased out (if any); (v) given in mortgage (proprietary or tenurial right)
- 5.4 Have you sold any land in the last 10 years or so?
- 5.4.1 If yes, how much and total value in Rs.
- 5.5 Did you buy any land in the last 10 years or so?
- 5.5.1 If yes, how much and total value paid in Rs.
- 5.5.2 Whether this land is under adhi/self cultivation/any other (specify)
- 5.6 Do you have land with irrigation facilities?
- 5.6.1 If yes, which one (from 5.3) and its size:

6. Size of the Land under Major Crops and Yields for the Last Year

	Aus		Aman		Any other (specify)	
	Size	Yield	Size	Yield	Size	Yield
Paddy						
Jute						
Any other (specify)						

7. Labour Utilization

- 7.1 Nature of work force: one's own/family's/family's + hired labour/only hired labour/any other (specify)
- 7.2 In case of hired labour, whether labour is employed on: yearly basis/monthly basis/weekly/daily/or combination of one or more of these
- 7.2.1 In case yearly, whether their employment is: (i) permanent (confirmed), (ii) temporary (non-confirmed)
- 7.3 Nature of work and wages for yearly and otherwise employed labourers.

	Types of labour	Rate	Nature of wages	Nature of work	Basis of work assignment	Who provides the implements
(i)	Yearly employed labourer					
(ii)	Seasonal/ monthly/ weekly/ daily employed labourer					

7.4 Nature of extra service taken; if any:

Types of labour	Agricultural or non-agricultural services	Details of nature of work	Whether additional wages paid		If extra wages not paid, then any other benefits (specify)
			Yes	No	
Yearly employed labour					
Seasonal/ monthly/weekly/ daily employed labourers					

8. Land Under Sharecropping

8.1 Whether any land is under adhi cultivation:

8.1.1 If yes, whether the nature of rights under adhi is of proprietary ownership/legal tenancy/mortgaged/any other (specify)

8.2 What is the size of total land under adhi?

8.3 Distance of the land under adhi from your village:

8.4 Whether there is any irrigation facilities in these lands:

8.5 How many adhiars do you have at present?

8.6 What is the size of share you get:

8.7 How much did you get last year out of adhi?

Crops

Aus

Aman

(i) Jute

(ii) Paddy

(iii) Any other(specify)

8.8 Whether the share received is: (i) in produce; (ii) in cash; (iii) mainly produce + some cash

8.9 What are the major crops of adhi cultivation: (i) Aus; (ii) Aman; (iii) any other (specify)

8.10 Who decides the choice of crops: yourself/adhiar/adhiar with your consultation

8.11 What is the extent of your contribution in production processes:

Sl.No.	Items	Wholly	Partly	Nil
1.	Seeds			
2.	Cattles			
3.	Implements			
4.	Manures			
5.	Wages, if any			
6.	Any other(specify)			

8.12 For how long have you given the land on adhi? (i) less than 6 months; (ii) less than 1 year; (iii) more than 1 year (specify)

8.13 Whether the adhi contract is oral/or registered:

8.14 Whether the land under adhi has decreased or/increased during the last 10 years?

- 8.14.1 By how much (approximately):
- 8.15 Whether the number of adhiars has increased/or decreased during the last 10 years?
- 8.15.1 By how many (specify):
- 8.16 In case, you have no land under adhi now, did you have earlier?
- 8.16.1 If yes, when did you abandon leasing out on adhi?
- 8.16.2 Why did you abandon it?
- 8.17 Why do you give the land under adhi at present?
- 8.18 Social composition of adhiars: Ethnicity Subgroup
- (i)
- (ii)
- (iii)
- (iv)

9. Nature of Tenurial Leasing in and Leasing out if any

- 9.1 Have you leased in/or leased out/or both?
- 9.2 Whether it is legally recognised?
- 9.3 Some details about leasing:

Types of leasing	Recorded non-recorded	Irrigated-non-irrigated	Nature of rights	Nature of rent
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1. Leasing in
2. Leasing out

contd.

	Whether self cultivated or further leased out	Duration since it is leased	Reason for leasing	Social composition of lease holder
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1. Leased in
2. Leased out

10. Outside Linkage

- 10.1 Are you member of any organization?
- 10.2 If yes, which ones:

Type of organization	Reason of joining organization	Position in organization	Participation in any of its activities, if any
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- (i)
- (ii)
- (iii)

11. General Questions

- 11.1 What type of improvement are you trying to bring in your cultivation?
- 11.2 What are the difficulties are you facing?
- 11.3 Do you think your adhiars cooperate with you?

- 2.5 Duration of contract: Less than one year/one year/longer than one year(specify)
- 2.6 Whether the contract is oral or registered?
- 2.7 Whether this arrangement is coupled with any obligation?
- 2.7.1 If yes, whether it is due to indebtedness/mortgage/bonded labour/kinship bond/any other(specify)
- 2.8 Nature and extent of your contribution in production processes in relation to following:
- | Sl. No. | Items | Contributions wholly/partly/nil |
|---------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. | Seeds | |
| 2. | Cattles | |
| 3. | Fertilizers | |
| 4. | Implements | |
| 5. | Wages if any | |
| 6. | Any other (specify) | |
- 2.9 Size of your share in the produce: 1/4, 1/2, 1/3, 2/3, 3/4
- 2.10 Nature of the share paid: (i) produce rent, (ii) in cash, (iii) partly produce + some cash
- 2.11 Size of the land under major crops and total yield during the last year:
- | | <u>Crops</u> | <u>Size</u> | <u>Yield</u> | <u>Your share</u> | <u>Malik's share</u> |
|-----------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| (i) Aus | Paddy | | | | |
| | Jute | | | | |
| | Any other | | | | |
| (ii) Aman | Paddy | | | | |
| | Any other | | | | |
- 2.12 Nature of work force: One's own/family's/family's and hired labour/only hired labour/any other(specify)
- 2.13 In case some hired labour, information about nature of payment, work, employment, no. of labourers employed could be elicited
- 2.14 Occupation of the person with whom this contract has been made: service holder/mahajan/shop-keeper/jotedar/rich farmer/any other(specify)
- 2.14.1 His place of residence: Same village/neighbouring village (specify)/town/any other (specify)
- 2.14.2 His ethnic group: Bengalee/Marwari/Punjabi/any other(specify)
- 2.14.3 His subgroup (jati): Brahmin/Kayastha/any other(specify)
- 2.15 Since when are you working as a sharecropper?
- 2.16 Under how many maliks have you been working as a sharecropper during the last 10 year?
- 2.17 What was the size of land:
- 2.18 For the last 10 years, have you been working under the same malik(s) or have you changed malik(s):
- 2.18.1 If under the same malik(s), whether by your preference or by any obligation (specify)
- 2.18.2 If changed, how did you manage to get this new contract?
- 2.19 Is the present size of your holding under adhi less than what you had 10 year back?
- 2.19.1 If yes, what do you think, is the reason?

3. Nature of Employment, Work and Wages (only for agricultural and plantation labourers)

- 3.1 Whether you are employed with one/two/or more employers at a time (specify):
- 3.2 Whether your employment is: (i) permanent (confirmed); (ii) temporary (non-confirmed); (iii) only occasional
- 3.3 Whether the contract is on: daily basis/weekly/monthly/seasonal/yearly/any other(specify)
- 3.4 Rate at which you are paid:
- 3.5 Wages received: (i) only in cash; (ii) mainly in cash + some kind; (iii) mainly in kind + some cash; (iv) only in kind; (v) any other(specify)
- 3.6 Gross value of annual wages received:
- 3.7 Nature of work performed: (i) ploughing; (ii) harvesting, (iii) transplanting; (iv) weeding; (v) pruning; (vi) any other(specify)
- 3.8 Who provides the necessary implements
- | Sl. | Nature of work | Yourself | Employer |
|-----|----------------------|----------|----------|
| 1. | Ploughing | | |
| 2. | Harvesting, plucking | | |
| 3. | Weeding | | |
| 4. | Pruning | | |
| 5. | Planting | | |
| 6. | Any other (specify) | | |
- 3.9 Whether the assignment of work is done on (i) only hourly basis; (ii) mainly hourly + some piece work; (iii) mainly piece work + some hourly; (iv) only piece work.
- 3.10 Specify the standard hours of work, you are obliged to perform at the rate you are paid:
- 3.11. Do you perform any extra service: (i) one which is outside the contract but agriculture; (ii) one which is non-agricultural
- 3.11.1 Nature of work performed on extra-service:
- 3.11.2 Cash payment received if any on account of the extra-services: (details)
- 3.11.3 Any other benefits besides cash payment: (i) free land grant; (ii) free housing; (iii) homestead land; (iv) free food for children; (v) educational expenses for children; (vi) provident fund; (vii) Bonus; (viii) free firewood; (ix) any other benefit (specify)

4. Credit and Indebtedness (for both sharecroppers and labourers)

- 4.1 Are you self-sufficient or you need credit?
- 4.2 Are you indebted now?
- 4.2.1 If no, were you indebted during the last 10 years?
- 4.3 If yes (either for 4.2 or 4.2.1), for how long and how much amount you owe or owed:
- 4.4 Reason of indebtedness in order of priorities:

- 4.5 Your source of credit: bank/mahajan/govt. agency/shop-keeper/your jotedar/rich farmer/any other (specify)
- 4.6 Form in which credit received:
- 4.7 Duration within which repayment is or was to be made: (i) less than 3 months; (ii) less than 6 months; (iii) more than 6 months (specify)
- 4.8 What security did you give to get the credit? Mortgaged land/valuables/promisory note/any other (specify)
- 4.9 In what way are you to repay or you repaid the credit? Cash/ kind/service/surrendering the produce/market adjustment/ any other (specify)
- 4.10 Rate of interest:
- 4.11 Creditor's (i) ethnicity, (ii) subgroup (jati)

5. Previous Landholding if any (for sharecroppers as well as landless labourers)

- 5.1 Did you possess land previously?
- 5.1.1 If yes, nature of rights: proprietary/legal tenancy/berga/ any other (specify)
- 5.2 Size of land:
- 5.3 Distance from the present habitation:
- 5.4 What happened to that: sold/mortgaged/any other (specify)
- 5.4.1 What was the reason: repayment of debts/land on cultivation uneconomical/any other (specify)
- 5.4.2 If repayment of debt, then what for the loan was taken:
- 5.4.3 What value did you receive if you sold your land:
- 5.4.4 Was the price you got: (i) more than market price; (ii) just the market price; (iii) less than market price
- 5.5 Occupation of the person who bought your land: mahajan/ jotedar/service holder/shop-keeper/rich farmer/any other (specify)
- 5.6 His residence: town/same village/neighbouring village (specify distance)/any other (specify)
- 5.7 His ethnicity: marwari/bengali/punjabi/any other(specify)
- 5.8 His subgroup (jati):

6. Present Landholding, if any (For sharecroppers and land-less labourers)

- 6.1 Do you possess any piece of land at present?
- 6.1.1 If yes, nature of rights: proprietary/legal/tenancy/free grant/any other (specify)
- 6.2 Size of land:
- 6.3 Distance from your habitation:
- 6.4 Mode of farming: self cultivation/tenancy/barga/any other (specify)
- 6.5 Details of crops for the last year
- | No. of crops | Major crops | Total yield |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Aman | | |
| Aus | | |
| Any other(specify) | | |

- 6.6 In case free grant, criteria for such grant: length of service/family size/any other (specify)
- 6.7 In case tenancy or barga, some information about rent, share, nature of rights, social composition of leaseholder etc.
7. Total Production (Aus + Aman including) and Marketing for the last year (primarily for sharecropper; for landless only if there is any)

Crops	Production		
	from barga after sharing	from other holding if any	Total
Paddy			
Jute			
Any other(specify)			

contd.

Crops	Marketing						
	Purchaser				Mode of purchase		
	Quantity sold	(village bania)	Itinerant merchant in hats	Any other	Wholesales or in ins-talments	Broker	Month
Paddy							
Jute							
Any other (specify)							

- 7.1 Have you to buy food grain from market?
- 7.1.1 If yes, (i) for how many months, (ii) which are those months

8. Outside Linkage (Both for sharecroppers and landless labourers)

- 8.1 Are you member of any organization?
- 8.2 if yes, which ones
- | | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Type of organization | Reason of joining the organization | Position in the organ-ization | Participation in organiza-tional activi-ties, if any |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
- (i)
- (ii)
- (iii)

9. General Questions

- 9.1 What is your economic condition today compared to last 25 years?
- 9.2 What are the reasons for that?
- 9.3 Has there been any substantial change in your relation with the malik for last 25 years?
- 9.4 How do you conceive the relation between yourself and the malik? (i) just, (ii) reasonably good, (iii) fair, (iv) occasionally unreasonable, (v) usually oppressive/exploitative (left to investigator's judgement for ranking).